

Mennonites and the Crimean War (1853 – 1856): Three Eyewitness Accounts

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In her reign from 1762 – 1796, Catherine the Great initiated a successful policy of extending Russia’s national boundaries while defending lands conquered earlier. A concern for bringing in colonists to settle these added lands, and otherwise to increase productivity, upheld the impetus of her growing empire. She drafted her first colonization manifesto already in the first year of her reign. Several other “calls to colonists” aimed at foreigners followed quickly. Meanwhile Turkish armies ringed the southwestern borders of the realm, and other foreign powers would soon wonder where her rather obvious ambitions might lead her eventually.

*Catherine’s terms of colonization were generous and inviting. They included vast grants of free land, and exemption from taxes in the first years of settlement, as well as freedom from military and civil service. Mennonites who moved to New (South) Russia during her reign benefited from such concessions, as did other co-colonists from abroad. The land scouts from the Danzig area, Jakob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch , who negotiated the first Mennonite Charter of Settlement (known as a *Privilegium*) with the New Russian Vice Regent Potemkin and Catherine in 1787, obtained their exemption from service in the military “for all time”. It was assumed by the Mennonites that all her royal successors would uphold that policy without significant revisions.*

Dealing with the military service question in New Russia.

The more formal confirmation of this *Privilegium*, released in 1800 by Tsar Paul I (1796-1801), amended the general exemption of the earlier manifestos and the original Mennonite charter of 1787, with Article No 7, stating, “We exempt all villages and homes in their colonies from all types of quartering (except when troops march through in which case the regulations for quartering shall apply) or supplying horse teams and transport labour (*podvods...*)”.¹ The arrangement covered all important exigencies relating to military service in perpetuity as far as the Mennonites were concerned.

¹ This essay relies heavily on the material of James Urry and Lawrence Klippenstein, “Mennonites and the Crimean War, 1854-1856,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* Vol.7, 1989, 9-32, cited below as “Crimean War”. A more recent treatment of Mennonites and the Crimean War is found in George K.Epp, *Geschichte der Mennoniten in Russland. Band II. Die Gemeinschaft zwischen Fortschritt und Krise 1820-1874* (Lage: Historische Kommission, Logos Verlag, 1998), 83-112. An English translation of Catherine’s 1763 manifesto appeared in Roger P. Bartlett, *Human Capital: The settlement of foreigners in Russia 1762-1804* (Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 237-241. The basic exemption clause is in Point.VI of the terms of settlement. On Mennonite negotiations and settlement arrangements see Lawrence Klippenstein, “Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia: A Case Study in Church-State Relations 1789-1936”, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota , 1984, 11-12, cited below as “Mennonite Pacifism”. The amendments of Tsar Paul I included in his 1800 reissue of the Charter of Settlement are found in an English translation in William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony. Revised Edition* (Winnipeg, Man.: CMBC Publications, 1986), 124, and in a much earlier German edition in David H.Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten: Versuch einer Darstellung des Entwicklungsganges derselben* (Rosenthal bei Chortitz, Russland, 1888), 65. Documentation of the court’s discussion , if there was any, of these changes with the Mennonite delegation sent to bring home the formal Charter, is not extant.

The Turkish and Swedish threats to Russia appeared to be under control as the Mennonite emigration from Danzig and West Prussia got underway. However, the new colonists of Chortitza and Molotschna would connect, at least indirectly, with four Russian wars (the Swedes in the north, the Turks in the southwest, the war with Napoleon plus the various threats of rebellion on her western borders, e.g. in Poland and Hungary) prior to the Crimean conflict which is the topic of this essay. None of them brought any public call to review the exemption privilege offered in the original *Privilegium*.

The eighteenth century struggles with Sweden, the first of the aforementioned conflicts, still included sporadic engagements ongoing during the time of the land scout inspection and emigration in 1786-89. It seems, however, that such clashes did not impact departing Prussian Mennonite families in any significant way. Closer to the eventual routes of Mennonite immigration, Potemkin's conquests of Turkish-held territories along the Black Sea littoral, basically completed by this time, did interfere with original arrangements made for the Mennonite move.

Continuing insecurities in this former war zone were a reason given by Potemkin for not granting the Mennonite emigrating family groups the Berislav site on the lower Dnieper River area selected by and promised to Hoepfner and Bartsch. Instead immigrants had to settle for a much less suitable acreage, as they saw it, on the mainland to the west of Chortitza Island opposite Alexandrovsk on the east bank of the river. The Danzig and Prussian emigrants would have nearly two decades, as it turned out, to establish new homes before another war-related issue would confront them here.²

Napoleon's war with Russia, culminating in Moscow's capture in 1812, and then the subsequent French retreat, did directly affect the recently-arrived German/Mennonite colonists of New Russia. Some Mennonite leaders resisted the "invitation" of Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) presumably submitted to all new foreign colonists, to send "gifts" to the government in support of the Russian war effort. Some Mennonite leaders believed that gathering such "gifts" for the government would compromise the spirit of the *Privilegium* contract and their pacifist principles. Some contributions nevertheless found their way to the local administrative offices of the Chortitza and Molotschna settlements and thus to government coffers which funded Russian resistance to Napoleon.³

Another Russo-Turkish war in 1828, along with moves to put down a Polish uprising in 1830 again brought appeals to the German colonists of south Russia to stand by with non-combatant aid. Most likely similar appeals reached the Mennonite communities also, but there is no available record of help given to the government in these confrontations.

² For a brief account of the establishment of the first Mennonite colonies in New Russia see Lawrence Klippenstein, "Four Letters to Susanna from Johann Bartsch: A Danzig Mennonite Land Scout, 1786-87," *the polish review* vol. LIV no. 1, 2009, 31-60, and the same author's "The Mennonite Migration to (New) Russia 1786-1806," in John J. Friesen, ed., *Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg, Man.: CMBC Publications, 1989), 13-42.

³ The issue is discussed in more detail in Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism", 24-25. The ensuing debate, along with differences on other church-related issues, fueled a decision by Klaas Reimer, who had led the dissenting movement, to form the *Kleine Gemeinde* (lit. "small church") in 1812. Delbert Plett, ed., "Aelt. Klaas Reimer 1770-1837" in *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812-1874* (Steinbach, Man.: Crossway Publications, 1993), 113-222. The members of this church group decided unanimously in 1873-1874 to emigrate to North America. The military exemption issue raised by all Russian Mennonites of that period held centre stage among reasons for the move.

When they approached Nicholas I (1825-1855) to seek further confirmation for their *Privilegium*, they added promises of non-combatant support for the tsar during times of international struggle. In 1848, when Nicholas I announced the imminence of a European-wide revolt, they added a gift of 130 horses to their previous commitments.⁴ That kind of help would greatly expand when the battles of the Crimean War broke out less than a decade later.

Beginning the Black Sea Conflict

The Crimean invasion by West European powers in 1853-54 dramatically magnified the issue of Mennonite involvement in Russia's wars. So far nothing had forced a review of the *Privilegium* regarding participation in military action since the Mennonites moved in six decades earlier. Nicholas I had given his word to uphold what Catherine II once promised long ago. Mennonite leaders felt confident nothing could shake what had been granted "for all time". No "smaller" war had come along to provide a trial run of what would follow if a major conflict should engulf the Mennonite colonies themselves. Now the Crimean-based conflict would present a new scenario entirely. In retrospect it seemed that the Mennonites would take that challenge in their stride as well.

It is unclear whether any publicity regarding possible fighting on a Crimean front reached the South Russian Mennonite colonies before the shooting began. Relatively good diplomatic relations had prevailed between Russia and Britain till near the middle of the century. The major powers were not seriously looking for reasons to change this situation.

In fact, it seemed that the prospect of facing an enemy in the Crimean region had caught the tsar himself off guard. Was he somewhat out of touch with what other powers were thinking about his "policing policies" in Europe? Was he assuming that some gratitude would remain there for his help in keeping the western revolutionary forces at bay?⁵

There were, however, some factors beyond his immediate purview that would set the fire ablaze. The Holy Land dispute was possibly one of them. Almost overnight, at mid century, the peace of Europe ended as its guns began to thunder on the shores of the Black Sea. A politico-religious quarrel, highlighted in 1850, emerged to begin hostilities. It had to do with protecting some of the sacred shrines of Jerusalem. Several of them

⁴ Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism," 31-32. The 1828 call for assistance from German colonists in the Odessa region is discussed in P. Conrad Keller, *The German Colonists in South Russia 1804-1904*, trans. by A. Becker (Saskatoon, Sask.: A. Becker, 1968), 104ff. On Russia's emerging militarism in the 19th century see John L.H. Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar: Army and Society in Russia 1462-1874* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) and John Shelton Curtiss, *The Russian Army under Nicholas I. 1825-1855* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965). See also Urry and Klippenstein, "Crimean War", 9-10.

⁵ A fairly recent treatment of the diplomatic background for the Crimean War is found in Michael Hirst, "Crimean War, 1853-1854", in *Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, Vol. 8, 1978, 104-114.

were politically connected to western powers particularly France; others existed under the wings of an Orthodox protector, Nicholas I.

With an urge to protect their mutual interests, the adversaries, with their attendant hopes of boosting diplomatic influence and political “presence” situated Nicholas I as the champion of the Orthodox Christians in the East, and thus a counter to Catholic claims supported by Napoleon III of France. In February, 1853, the tsar sent a special mission headed by Prince A.S. Menshikov to obtain Turkish support to settle the dispute in his favour. When the Turks hesitated, Russian forces entered the Danubian principalities in July to back up the tsar’s demands.

Anti-Russian diplomats in western Europe and some of the major British newspapers rang loud bells of alarm, at once interpreting this military move as part of a Russian drive to take Constantinople and whatever else they could from Turkey, the so-called “sick man of Europe”. To counter Russian initiatives in the Balkans, Britain sided with the French and the Turks in their own show of force which signalled evidence of quick escalation. Austria, also fearing the growth of Russian influence in the region, took a strongly neutralist stand, if anything looking for support from the West. The Russians found themselves in isolation, facing a European alliance. A war had begun, it seemed, without a deliberate design on any nation’s part, to start one.

Early Battles

Armed conflict between eastern and western powers would now centre on the Crimea when the British and French sought a landing to take Sevastopol in 1854. The Russians concentrated all available resources to resist this invasion. The strain of keeping some Russian forces in the north in case of a British invasion in the Baltic region, and defending the western front in case of unexpected Prussian or Austrian military initiatives, hindered a quick Russian focus on its southern front.. To that were added the serious weaknesses of poor communications and bad roads for troop transport, with long distances to travel to provision troops on the peninsula. Early losses and failure to respond to the sudden invasion by the British and French armies projected a Russian rout almost before the fighting commenced.

Local communities along military travel routes were immediately called to help as they could. German and other foreign colonists at once became a vital part of supporting military efforts to deal with an impending Russian retreat. As the situation developed each side would eventually bring about 170,000 men and more into the military arena. The landing could not be prevented, however, and the siege of the naval city itself would last through 1854 and into the summer of 1855.

Guns were soon pounding seacoast centres almost due south of the oldest colony Chortitza, as well as further east on the Sea of Azov shoreline at Berdiansk south of the Molotschna settlement. Mariupol, just south of the Bergthal colony received shelling also, and the Mennonites there soon found refugees from other communities at their doorstep.

Very little data is available on Mennonite discussions regarding the role they might need to play in this war. All assumed that they were still exempt from any obligations of armed combat involvement as promised by the *Privilegium*. Molotschna Mennonites observed Russian troops moving south already in January, 1854. These will have given

clear warnings of the start of upcoming military engagements. An Odessa German newspaper, *Unterhaltungsblatt für deutsche Ansiedler im südlichen Russland*, (A Discussion Vehicle for German Colonists in Russia) launched several years earlier, may have carried related information.⁶

Mennonites Engaged: Three Participant Accounts

Mennonite supporting action in the war theatre appears to have materialized quickly as orders from government authorities reached local administrators of the villages. On March 12, 1854, Mennonite villagers began to sign pledges to collect funds, and give other aid for those made homeless in the fighting. They also promised to help wounded soldiers. The most arduous tasks will have come with the commandeering of transport vehicles with drivers for hauling supplies to the front and whatever immediate work now had to be done quickly to upgrade roads and bridges, etc., as called for in the *Privilegium*.

Several eyewitness documents provide glimpses of war-related Mennonite transport contributions, albeit as non-combatants throughout. First to be cited in this study is a personal memoir written by Heinrich B Friesen. The second of these reports has been called the “Neuendorf Diary”. It appears to originate in the village of Neuendorf of the Chortitza, settlement. Its authorship has not been clearly authenticated. The third witness is found in one Jakob Niebuhr’s *Chronik*.⁷

Friesen’s Autobiography

In January 1855, large groups of soldiers marched on the post road that went past the Molotschna villages. The Mennonites had been granted freedom from military service and also transportation of soldiers and supplies. With the offer of payment the transportation of supplies became a must.⁸

In February a government order commandeered a certain number of conveyances from each village to meet at a designated place on the Molotschna River in order to transport troops and supplies. There was much snow that year. Then it began to thaw.

⁶ Urry and Klippenstein, “Crimean War”, 10. Descriptive accounts of the war in progress can be found in Albert Seaton, *The Crimean War: A Russian Chronicle* (London: Batsford, 1977), and Alan Palmer, *The Banner of Battle: The Story of the Crimean War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987). See also Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*, 56ff, including his citation of N. Schilder, *Graf Eduard Ivanovich Totleben* (St. Petersburg, 1885), 707-710.

⁷ Klippenstein, “Mennonite Pacifism”, 33, mentions some specific financial contributions. Participant recorded comments and notations cited here are in August Schmidt, trans. and ed., *The Autobiography of H(enry) B Friesen 1837-1926* (Newton, Kans.: typescript, 1974); Johann Wall (?) *Neuendorf Diary*, in the Jacob Rempel papers, *Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives*, Vol. 1086, and notes taken by the late David G. Rempel from the Jacob Niebuhr *Chronik*, not available for this study as an original document. All these items were provided by Alf Redekopp of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives.. See also Jacob Unruh, *The Peter Unruh Genealogy* (Kansas, self-published, 1959), 108-109.

⁸ The revised issuance (confirmation) of the *Privilegium* given the Mennonites for settling in 1800 did not necessarily exclude *podvoding*, i.e. transport services during wartime. It is also possible that the Crimean situation, i.e. the offer of payment for services, put the *podvod* in place at this time, with not too many questions asked (or publicized) by the Mennonites. As for the Russian authorities, there is no reference anywhere to a consideration of lifting the exemption from carrying arms on the front.

Low places on the road began to fill with water and where there were no bridges or dams it became very dangerous to venture into the water. A number who did get out with their bare lives, and a few drowned. This led to the expression “the water *podvod*”. Others had their wagons torn apart by the streams and saved themselves by swimming to shore. The men from Alexanderthal fortunately all came back without suffering harm or sickness.⁹

During the summer there was peace, although many rumours and much talk about war (abounded). Then in September an order came from the local government that every ten farms (*Wirtschaften*) should furnish one wagon for transportation of military supplies. Much concern was expressed. Would they come back safely? The older people still remembered the French War of 1812 and what had happened then. Many had left their wagons and had come home on foot, while others had not come back at all.¹⁰

The two who went from our village were my brother Gerhard, and my father gave the team and wagon, and our neighbour across the street, Isaak Loewen. They left with many wishes for a safe and blessed trip. Where they were ordered to go I have forgotten. They had to transport a considerable distance into the Crimea. At times they had as many as fourteen soldiers in one wagon. The wagon was full so they all had to stand. They were gone six or more weeks. They came back in good health and full of courage.

We had very cold weather that winter. The war in the Crimea continued to intensify. The three nations in league with each other were England, France and the Turkish hordes. They joined the cross with the half moon. They wanted to take the Crimea from Russia. All of Europe pricked up its ears. They thought it would be a breakfast (i.e. a “cinch “-*ed.*) for them. They would not have to apply their whole might, etc.

In 1856, early in January, a courier came riding through the village with the order that each farm had to furnish one wagon, except the preacher and the village magistrate. They should immediately get ready to haul provisions from Tonda to the fortress Sevastopol in the Crimea on the Black Sea.

There was much that had to be considered, much to be remembered, and much work so that nothing would be lacking on the trip. A tarpaulin (*robotke*) for each wagon, horses had to be shod all around, good tight blankets for the horses, warm clothing, one large and one smaller fur coat, a fur cap with a cover which could be pulled over the head (*burnusz* and *bushlik*). Food also had to be prepared. *Zwieback* were baked and toasted, peppernuts were baked, bread and meat also had to be prepared. The trip would take about four weeks, so everything had to be planned ahead. A kettle to cook potatoes and dumplings, and what not, also a coffee kettle.

Always two (wagons) went together so that they would not both have to take cooking utensils along. Also feed for the horses had to be taken. As I remember there were only six or seven (days?) to get things ready so the work had to go on day and night to get everything done.

⁹ See Heinrich Dirks, “Die Podwodzeit,” *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* (1911), 34, Klippenstein, “Mennonite Pacifism”, 33ff, as well as Urry and Klippenstein, “Crimean War”, 12ff.

¹⁰ The normal procedure of passing on government orders would have been to send these from the Guardians’ Committee to district directors in the colonies (*Oberschulzen*) who would in turn send on orders to local village directors (*Schulzen*). The reference to the Napoleonic invasion of 1812 is enigmatic. So far no other data has come forward to indicate that Mennonites rendered *podvod* service during that war, although financial “contributions” to the war effort were solicited and received by the government. The theatres of conflict at the time were far removed from the Mennonite settlements.

The dear father went himself. The wagons all came together at one end of the village in one long row. Whoever could was there to see them go. With many wishes for God's blessing and a safe return, they were sent off. Each village had to appoint a counselor to see that everything was done in an orderly manner. From our village this was Peter Funk. The wagon train started in God's name.

That year we had an extremely cold winter. The windows were frosted over during the whole month without thawing. As we sat in the warm room, we often thought of and bewailed the fate of our loved ones in the cold outside.

During this month my dear grandmother in Blumenort died. I, David, and Anna went for the funeral. We started early in the morning and got there for dinner. For the last time I was permitted to see in death the pale face of my grandmother. How often had I put my face in her lap to weep and receive comfort; She always was friendly, and willing to sacrifice. I often have had to think back to the time I was in her care. The dear father on the trip hauling supplies for the army (*podvod*), also Uncle Jacob Friesen, came home the day after the funeral. The funeral sermon was preached by Elder (*Aeltester*) Bernhard Fast from Orloff, as I remember it. The next day we went home again.

Those who had gone on the trip (*podvod*) all came home safe, but the very cold weather had evidently been too much for several of the neighbours. They took sick and died. The ones across the street, Isaak Loewen and Jacob Penner, usually called Cobbler Penner, both died. Both were in their best years. Before these, two grown daughters of Bernhard Klassen had died, Margareta and Helena.

Because so many men were away on *podvod* Heinrich Neuman and I had to take our turns digging graves. One day I had to deliver a death message to Pordenau. When I came back to the cemetery, my nose and cheeks were frozen. During this time I became more accepted and rose in the estimation of the young people of the village. When the second daughter of E. Klassen was buried, the father also became sick and died. That created a big gap in their family. At the same time Aunt Isaak Epp was very sick but she recovered.

At the time of the funeral, there was a village magistrate meeting in Halbstadt. It was our turn to drive, but since father had just come back from the trip (*podvod*), I had to take the magistrate at that time. We started after lunch and came to Tiegenhagen for the night. We stayed at Bernhard Matthies. Mrs. Matthies was a sister of Mrs. Duerksen. Early in the morning we started for Halbstadt. When the meeting was over, we went back to Tiegenhagen for the night at the same place. We came back after three days on a Sunday.

The same evening a meeting of the village was called. Twenty four wagons from our village had to be furnished.¹¹ Each had to make three trips from where the supplies had been collected at Tonka to be transported to the fortress Sevastopol on the Black Sea. Altogether it would take about eight weeks.

The trip began at the beginning of February. This time Father was the counselor or overseer, and David had to go along to drive. It was not as cold this time but no picnic. They stayed till early spring; we had already started to plough. All came back well and in good spirits, except one, Franz Pauls. One morning as they started he had been caught

¹¹ The furnishing of wagons is described in *podvod* involvements of non-Mennonite German colonists in Keller, *German Colonists*, 106-108.

between the wheels and severely wounded. They brought him as far as Lichtenfeld where he died and was brought home a corpse....¹² The transportation of supplies had to go on.

I have to go back in my narrative for a while. In the fall of the previous year, the Molotschna colonies had offered to take care of and nurse wounded soldiers. The government accepted this with gratitude. How many wagon loads were taken I don't remember. My father sent me on this trip. This was also my first one.

We started toward the end of October and it was a very long one (trip?). The first day we came to Altenau where we also stayed for the night. From there we went to Terpinnig¹³ up a high hill about fourteen miles and then to Melitopol. When we got this far we encountered a terrible southwest wind. As we drove alongside a Russian village we saw a number of people sitting on the straw roofs. As we watched a whirlwind came and tipped the roof off one of the houses, together with the people on it. Also the small Russian windmills could not stand against the fury of the wind.

When we came to Melitopol we saw another interesting spectacle. In the marketplace a Jew had set out for sale in a wooden booth, articles of various descriptions including caps. A gust of wind turned over the booth and his things sailed through the air all over the place. The Jew evidently had been a thorn in the eyes of the other business people at the market, for when this happened they shouted and clapped their hands. As suddenly as the wind came up, it also died down. But it caused much damage, also to the warships of the enemy.

We stayed overnight in the city. The next day we went about twenty miles when we met a caravan of wagons loaded with wounded soldiers. They were now loaded into our wagons. I got only four soldiers, not very sick, only somewhat weak. Some (wagons) had to transport very sick men who groaned much as they got into the wagons and also while we drove. We went back to Melitopol. At the market a barrel of whiskey was set out and each soldier received a small glassful. Here the drivers received numbers which directed them to their night quarters. When we came to our night quarters there were about twenty soldiers there to check the sick which we brought. The people at this lodging place got up at 3 o'clock in the morning and butchered a sheep, baked bread, cooked borscht, etc. Then they went to bed again, but got up by lamplight to get a breakfast ready, of which we also got our part.

At 9 o'clock all wagons were ready and assembled in the market place. Here each soldier received another glass of whiskey again. We came to the village of Orloff¹⁴ for the night. I and my cousin Penner were together for the night with J.Thiessens, a very good place. The next day we came to the village Prangenau where we ate dinner at

¹² A lengthy section describing a grasshopper plague which decimated the communities of Alexanderthal, Elizabeththal and Steinbach in the Molotschna settlement, is omitted in this recital of events. See Friesen, *Autobiography*, 10-11.

¹³ This very likely refers to Terepenie, a contemporary Ukrainian town located not far from the west bank of the Molotschna River southwest of the former Altenau. The places mentioned here are villages of the Molotschna colony. Melitopol was a city off the west bank of the Molotschna River somewhat southwest of the Molotschna colony. For an orientation to the trip as they entered the Crimean peninsula, and the various Molotschna village referred to, see William Schroeder and Helmut T Huebert, eds., *Mennonite Historical Atlas. Second Edition. Revised and Expanded* (Winnipeg, Man.: Springfield Publishers, 1996), 28, 34.

¹⁴ This meant the caravan had reached the southern sector of the Molotschna settlement which brought them to communities where they were likely to meet Mennonite families with whom they might be acquainted.

Heinrich Penners. Toward evening we came home. Each farmer had to take one soldier and keep him until he was well again.¹⁵ Our parents had a nice young soldier named Tyci (Tyai?) by name. It took the rest of the winter for him to get well.

In the beginning of 1856, another call came to transport supplies. This gave me the opportunity to make the trip, which was a great joy to me. I made a number of trips but none that I enjoyed as much as this. Heinrich Funk, a neighbour in his best years, was our counselor, Martin Duerksen, the same age as I, became my best friend. There were also three Russian boys on this trip. We five were always together.

We had good weather during the trip. There were six to seven stations to Tonka, about three days letting the horses amble along. Here each wagon had to load five *kull* (1 *kull* was 200 pounds) grits. From here we drove to the Crimea.

After we had gone some distance we were greatly delighted by the many tulips of all different colours that we saw along the way. O, how beautiful Russia is during May, especially for those of us who were young and full of *wanderlust* (have a zest for travel-*ed*). When we came to the Dzhangra bridge spanning the Salzleman River, a soldier stood at each end, but did not bother us. The bridge was built of wood and as I remember three fifths of a mile long and beyond it a dam about one-third of a mile long. For a while after that we had to drive in mud and water, which reached up to the axles. Luckily no one got stuck. Whoever has had the misfortune of getting stuck in such mud and water can imagine what a calamity that would have been. Others have had to experience that. From here on we were in the Crimea.

When we had gone about a day's journey we noticed a dark line on the horizon which we thought were clouds. As we drove on it seemed to come higher, but seemingly we did not get any closer. Finally Uncle Funk said, "Those are the Crimean Mountains". As we drove along we passed a field of bright begonias. We came to the local government town of Simferopol, which is closer to the mountains, about 25-30 miles distant.

The main street of this town was wide, but the others were so narrow that two wagons could not pass each other. On another occasion we got into one of these narrow streets which caused us much worry trying to get out. A mountain stream called Spalgier with clear water ran by the town. The town appeared to us to be a Tartar village.

After we left this place we came to a German village, Kronsthal. Here we saw large vineyards, really grapes planted on the mountainside and terraces, so arranged that they could be irrigated. Here we could drink wine as water. We stayed here for the night. From there we drove to a mountain stream, Alma by name. Close by there was a large hill. Here the first battle had been fought last fall.¹⁶

¹⁵ This would include personal nursing services offered as needed, along with regular bed and board. While wages were paid for transportation services, it is very likely that all home care services were given free of charge as voluntary work for the country. It is not clear if there were any regular clinics which could assist with home care as needed here.

¹⁶ The decision to invade the Crimea was taken in Paris at the end of June 1854, by representatives of the French and British governments. Allied forces began their landing near Eupatoria on September 14. Their total of 60,000 men was made up of 25,000 French, 27,000 British and 8,000 Turkish soldiers. The Battle of Alma then ensued on September 20, when the Russians engaged 35,000 men against 57,000 placed in battle by the Allies. A resounding defeat for the Russians followed, with casualties for the Allies totaling more than 3,000, and for the Russians almost twice that number. A battle with the Turks on the Caucasian front in the summer of 1854 had ended with a Russian victory in which the Russians had 3,000 casualties, and the Turks 8,000, including dead and wounded, with 2000 prisoners. It may have led to underestimating the Allied resources, perhaps due to faulty intelligence. A further outcome of this battle was a commitment

We fed our horses there and took time to view the battlefield. There were many graves, also large ones where thousands of mutilated bodies lay. As we went along we saw the boot of a soldier sticking out of the ground. One of the Russian boys took hold of it, and pulled and the whole leg came along. He quickly dropped it and ran off. Here we also met some important-looking men, maybe generals or something like that. They asked us questions in the Russian language but we could not understand them.

One of them could speak German. He asked us from where we came, what we had on our wagons, and how far we had come. We told him we had come from the Molotschna, about 300 miles, and that we were Mennonites. Then he said, ‘*Kreuz, donner wetter,*’ (profanity - cross, thunder and lightning-*ed*), that is far”. I do not recall if we took off our caps. Not having expected to meet them, we probably forgot. The same day we got to Sevastopol, a very great fortress, but did not see much of it, but there were many other things to see.

We were close to the Black Sea where we could see the large warships of the enemies. At night we saw how they shot the fire bombs high up into the air, and then came down in a great semicircle, some exploding in the air, some when they hit the water. It was exciting to watch them.

It was here last winter that the drivers had such a dreadful experience. They had made everything ready for the night when all of a sudden bombs had begun to fall and explode close by. Pandemonium broke loose. In their hurry to get away, some had only half harnessed their horses in order to quickly get over the hill out of the way of the bombs. When they got there they were surprised how quickly that had been able to get away and had thanked God for His protection. What an evil war is, and what it can do we have abundantly seen and heard, but not the worst of it yet. This trip took fourteen days. I made several others later but enjoyed none as much as this one....

Before harvest Father had to make another trip, and I had to make three after harvest. We went along the Perekop road to a Magya (i.e. Hungarian) village, Artychick, where we had to load provisions and transport them beyond Perekop.¹⁷ This also lasted fourteen days. It was quite difficult driving in the heat of the summer along this much-travelled army highway. Often we had little or no water, the wells being empty when we got there. When we found good water we took some along for cooking or drinking, but the horses often had to go a long way before they got to water.

After we had unloaded our provisions, we went along the Salzleman (river). Here we had miserable roads at times. We passed the place where salt was heaped up in piles one after another about one hundred feet long, heaped to a point. From here it was hauled all over Russia.

At that time the Russians had a vehicle (*tschumak*) to which oxen were hitched (*povoss*). It was built completely out of wood, with not a single nail in it, yet they loaded fifty *pud* on it, and then they went slowly on their way (*pomolenko* is the Russian

to neutrality by Persia. Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire 1801-1917* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1967), 324-325.

¹⁷ The town of Perekop was located on a narrow strip of land which formed a kind of land bridge from the mainland to the peninsula at its northwestern corner. It offered road and railway access to the Crimea to connect with the town of Dzhankoy which lay on a route from the Molotschna area that came through a similar entry point on the northeast corner of the peninsula with an actual constructed bridge further east. These connections led on further to the main north-south road that ran south to Simferopol and ultimately ended at Sevastopol. Schroeder and Huebert, *Mennonite Historical Atlas*, 28.

(Ukrainian) expression). The number of wagons in such a caravan usually numbered from 40-60. There usually were four wagons to one driver. To hitch and unhitch the horses was very simple. Grass along the way was plentiful.

Two roads for transporting went through the Molotschna villages for transporting supplies. They were one and a half miles wide.¹⁸ Through the Mennonite colonies, dirt was heaped up in small hills on either side.

Continuing our story. When we returned and came to the Dzhangar bridge, a soldier stood at each end to inspect our vehicles, whether we had powder, cartridges or tobacco. At that time much smuggling was carried on with these items. We only needed to open our trunks in which we had our food, put some roasted *zwieback* (buns) into his bag which he had hanging over his shoulder whereupon he thanked us very much and we could go on. We came home just in time for harvest. We did not get to cut grain at home, but had opportunity to work. Uncle Heinrich Penner from Prangenau got us and we mowed there for a week. Then I had to drive a team and wagon to transport supplies again.

This time we went to another Magya village, Gartechuk. Here we had to wait awhile; nothing could be done with the commissary. While waiting, the drivers had plenty of time and opportunity to poke fun at each other. Almost every village had a nickname, which was an added reason for banter and fun. We came after those from the village of Contentiusfeld. After they had loaded it was our turn. Our counselor, John Kroeker, is still to get the bill of lading.

Some of their men were on top of their loads and shouted, “Meha” (Low German for “more”- *ed*). Others joined in which made a big uproar. This hurt the feeling of Counselor Kroeker and he threatened to take the matter to court. Then another counselor, Johann Dueck from Elizabethal came and said, “Johann, why are you making so much noise? He had to call out, “Meha, Mehah, mehah!” he said, and then the shouting and uproar started more vigorously than before. This caused Kroeker to run away. If he had acted as if he did not hear anything, nothing would have happened.

The commissar was a cruel, ruthless man. Whenever a wagon was loaded he would hit the horses with his whip and also the driver if he could get him. Everything went fast after this. During the whole trip we were together with those from Contentiusfeld because we had our bill of lading together. We had many pleasant experiences together.

When we came to Simferopol we found a great number of wagons there ready to unload. Here again we had trouble with the commissars. They wanted money and tried to get it any way they could. The chief counselor of our group, who also could speak Russian, had, as the proverb goes “hair on his teeth”. He went to the chief counselor (*polkoverk*) and told him about the condition (situation?), but he was not welcome there. “What do you want here?” they asked. “Here you have nothing to say”. “Just as much as you,” the counselor said. “Do you know who I am?” “Yes,” the counselor said, and added, “And do you know who I am?” Then the commissar shouted and used abusive language, and the counselor did also. The commissar then had threatened whereupon the

¹⁸ One pud was equal to 40 pounds. These public transport routes, known in German as *Tschumakenwege*, or *Salztrakt* led to huge salt deposits in the Volga region. See Heinrich Goerz, *The Molotschna Settlement*. Trans by Al Reimer and John B. Toews (Winnipeg, Man.: CMBS Publications, 1993), 16-17. Still in use when the Mennonites first came to New Russia, these roads disappeared completely as other kinds of transport came into use.

counselor said he should not try that because it might have bad consequences. Then he unbuttoned his coat and a round thing came into view (A whip or a stick? – *ed.*).

Immediately things had changed. The commissar had given him a paper and unloading had begun. We had to wait three or four days until we were in line to unload. Our wagons were on the north side of town, but the unloading was done on the south side on a hill. Every day we went through the town to see how the loading had progressed. When we noticed it soon would be our turn, we loaded all our things on to the wagons, and drove through town to get in line.

We now noticed that those who had unloaded (to go back through town to get their things from where we were camped) were stopped by the place (police?). They were taken to the over- filled hospitals where they had to load them with sick soldiers and take them into Russia until they could get rid of them, some of them as far as Kharkov.

Our turn came one afternoon. After we had unloaded we put all our things back into the wagons and fed our horses. At a given signal after it got dark we started slowly until we came to the post road (highway). On either side there was a ditch but not very deep. We all got over safely except one who tipped over. That delayed us some but otherwise nothing serious happened. When we went through the ditch we noticed there were men on horseback who held our horses by the bridles. What that meant we did not know.

After we had gone a ways we began to drive almost as fast as the horses could go. Then we let the horses get their wind and went slowly until we got to the big highway. We came home well and glad to be back. The trip had been pleasant. The dear Lord had been with us and protected us.

There was an intermission in the *podvod*, except that at one time sick soldiers had to be hauled further inland, but the hauling of provisions was at an end. Then at the end of the summer, a directive was received to get hayracks ready, fourteen feet long as I recall, to haul hay in the Crimea. It was my turn to make the trip, the fifth time, and it was begun with good courage.

The order was to haul two loads, so we had to get ready with feed for the horses, and food for four weeks. So we started in the name of the Lord toward the Crimea. From Melitopol a Cossack was assigned to one village or two together. They stayed with us during the whole trip. We took one together with the village of Grossweide. Peter Isaak and I became intimate friends on this trip because we were always together.

We had to go a ways into the Crimea until we found the hay.¹⁹ The hay was long and coarse and not like we were used to, but it lasted longer too. We went with the hay through Simferopol close to Bakhchisarai. Leaving this to one side we went farther into the mountains. Here we saw large apple orchards, but too bad, no apples on the trees. We came to a nice clear mountain stream, Alma, with a large level piece of ground. Before unloading our hay here each load here had to be weighed. They had built a large frame with a strong beam to balance the weights. On one end were the weights from 80 pounds and less. On the other end four strong ropes on each end. These were hooked on the hub of the wheel and the whole load weighted. Very practical for that time, not so?

¹⁹ The travel routes used by the transport drivers took the convoys more or less right through the territory explored by Jakob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch when they did a land scouting trip to this region before moving to New Russia in 1788 – 1789. Edwin Hoepfner, “Comments on the map of the route taken by Hoepfner and Bartsch 1786-1787,” *Preservings* No. 26, 2006, 83-84.

We had to go through an apple orchard with the trees so big that we could ride under the branches although we had to stoop some, as we rode the horses to be watered. We still saw the props under the branches which proved that they must have had many apples. We had very good weather so that the trips were made without trouble...

It was not long after we came home that orders came again to haul supplies. This time hay which had been bought in Crimea should be transported to Bakhchisarai. Father did not need to furnish a team and horses, having done this seven times. I drove John Neufeld's team. He was our neighbour. I received 50 kopecks per day (25c) and free board. Peter Kaspar also went and he was our councilman (counselor?).

It was the middle of February when we left and the road was very rough. We went one day but could not go on because it thawed and the road became impassable because of mud. We had come to a Magyar village, Old Burkut, where we waited several days. The horses became unruly and the boys also. It happened that while Peter Kaspar led his horses to be watered, they began to kick each other. It so happened that one kicked the other on the hind upper leg and tore loose a piece of hide. It looked terrible. The horses were shod with sharp shoes. By and by we came to Melitopol where Peter bought some medicine, mixed it with urine, and washed out the wound with it. Since we had nice weather after that it healed slowly but surely....

One day as we walked beside our wagons, we saw a nice piece of cloth lying beside the road. We picked it up and threw it in Peter's wagon. Because we thought we could use it, and he thanked us for it. All of a sudden we noticed he had not only a piece of cloth but also many lice. Luckily all the lice went along when he threw the cloth out of the wagon. This proves lice do not only hang on to people but can also be found along the road.

From Melitopol on we again had a Cossack accompany us. We had to go a long way into the Crimea before we came to the place where we had to load the hay. This first trip was made without unpleasant incidents until we unloaded our hay....

When we came back to our loads, there was nothing to do. We were still a long way from being in time to unload. No begging seemed to help. Finally several of the counsel men got together and went to town to see if they could get some relief there. They came to the right person, a young Cossack officer. He took his nimble horse and rode to the place where an old grey-bearded Jew was standing at the scales to weigh the hay. He asked to see his books and said a few words to him. He already had twirled his rubber (whip?) and then all of a sudden it came down on the back of the Jew like hail. That helped. We could unload our hay where we were without being weighed. This we did without much ado and soon were on our way home....²⁰

A Neuendorf Diary and the Niebuhr Chronicle

The so-called Neuendorf diary, detailing related activities based on Chortitza colony experiences; dates right back to the years cited and offers very abbreviated information

²⁰ Chapter IV on the *podvods* of the Crimean War in the H.B. Friesen memoir comprises just over 13 pages (8 – 21) , a text of which about half has been reproduced here. Other difficulties of travelling on further trips, and descriptions of various situations, including comments on the towns and people along the way, offer a similar commentary on the experience of *podvoding*. This document is still the longest and most detailed of its kind on this topic known to have survived as an eyewitness recorded report.

on daily life. From 1854 on the entries began to include notes on *podvod* involvements for the community.²¹ A selection of diary entries provides a somewhat different perspective on the whole enterprise, giving much data on many loads of supplies and materials which departed for the Crimean War theatre from the Neuendorf community.

Material quite closely related to the contents of the Neuendorf diary is found also in a document known simply as the *Niebuhr Chronicle*. Extant notes based on it are provided here, set in italics for easy comparison with the Neuendorf (regular font) diary entries.

March 10 I committed by signature to give a donation for those hurt by war (the Crimea), including injured soldiers. Required from each landholder (*Landwirth*) is 5 R(ubles) Silver, and beyond that 1 R(uble) banko for every insured *hube*.²² This amounts to _ R _ K banko for Neuendorf and _ for Chortitza colony.

March 13 Khortitza settlement makes a voluntary contribution of 4387 rubles and 64 kopeks toward care of wounded soldiers.

March 20 The Chortitza Colony had to supply 250 wagons and on the 22nd another 250 wagons for Ekaterinoslav, to load and transport soldiers. In Neuendorf the landholders had to supply 40 wagons and the small householders (*Anwohner*, that is, landless farm labourers) 10 wagons. The latter bartered their requirements down to 7 R(ubles) per day, making it 70 R(ubles) that the small householders had to pay. They stayed away on the caravan for 8 days making 415 R(ubles) costing each small householder 6 R(ubles) 80 k(opeks) making 414 R(ubles) 80 K(opeks).²³

²¹ The Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, both have copies of this document written in long-hand Gothic German but including a draft of an English translation in *Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives* (Vol. 1086, File 5a). It was utilized for these references. The identity of the author remains uncertain. In due time the document came to be part of a Wilhelm Rempel collection in Neuendorf of the Khortitza settlement. The Winnipeg copy has been attributed to one Johann Wall of Neuendorf, and is lodged at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives with the Jacob Rempel papers. It may be that the document came to Canada in the possession of Johann Wall of Reinland village in southern Manitoba. The *Chronicle* notes, cited in Urry and Klippenstein, are located also in *Mennonite Heritage Centre Archive*, Vol. 4225, File 11, and provided courtesy of archivist Conrad Stoesz .

²² One *hube* , likely derived from *hufe*, a Prussian term of land measurement, was equivalent to just under 41 acres. The blanks at the end of the entry intimate figures for rubles and kopecks were not available.

²³ These appear to have been the first government-commandeered local Mennonite transport vehicles as far as Chortitza Colony was concerned. The small householders were families which did not own land for cultivation, hence had to find non-farming ways of making a living. The men would hire out their services to landholders, or engage in small cottage industries of some sort. They were given land on which to build their usually small houses at the end of villages. So their contributions to the war effort were relatively small (i.e. compared to what was required of landholders). They could not, as individual householders, afford to outfit wagons. Instead they were assessed a certain manageable sum per household to help pay for general expenses related to transport supply.

No one has attempted, it would seem, to calculate the total number of versts, kilometers or miles that were racked up by the drivers of wagons throughout the war. It has been noted that the distance by road from Ekaterinoslav, where many of the caravans started off, to Sevastopol was somewhat over 500 *versts* (558 kilometers, or 335 miles) from Melitopol, southwest of Molotschna to Sevastopol was 314 *versts* (335 kilometers) and from Perekop to Sevastopol was 205 *versts* (219 kilometers). Wagons were unloaded at various towns along the way so distances travelled by different wagons on any particular trip could vary considerably. Urry and Klippenstein, *Crimean War*, 12.

March 22 It began to thaw and water went over the bridges.²⁴

March 24 The Neuenburgers returned from the hauling (*podvod*) trek.

March 24 *Khortitza volost* receives orders to have ready in two days five hundred two - horse-drawn wagons.

March 26 Rosenthal, Rosengart and Niederchortiza (landholders) returned.

March 28 Some Neuendorf landholders returned with about 10 loads.²⁵

March 29 The rest of the Neuendorfers returned with about 3 loads and the rest came back on the 31st. During this trip Gerhard Toews got into water and almost drowned, managing however to crawl out. He lost the last wagon and did not bring it home. Also a great coat and a fur coat were torn away. Isaac Miller of Neuhorst also got into water, and lost the last wagon. Both wagons were later recovered.

April 3 The bridges were repaired and made usable again.

April 5 Paid personal levies at the *Schulz's* at 3 R(ubles) 8 K(opeks) totaling 9 R(ubles) 24 K(opeks) for 3 persons.

April 12 I supplied two horses and Gerhard Wiebe supplied the wagon.

May 4 *Khortitza volost* completes post roads to facilitate transport of military personnel.

June 16 *Guardians' Committee* conveys to the *Khortitza* people His Imperial Majesty's appreciation for the gift of 4387 r(ubles) and 64 k(opeks).

July 26 Gave 14 R(ubles) 7 K(opeks) for the soldiers. Money was sent to St. Petersburg. In the *Khortitza* colony it amounted to 4387 R(ubles) 64 K(opeks) silver.²⁶

October 16 *Khortitza settlement* bakes 2225 pud of *zukharii* (roasted bread) for the military – without expense to the government- i.e. a voluntary gesture.

October 17 *Khortitza settlement* offers to transport the 2225 pud of *zukharii* at its own expense to *Jecklishbeck(?)*, *Crimea*.

²⁴ Neuendorf was built along both banks of a large creek, and being of fair size, had built several bridges in the community to connect the residences easily.

²⁵ These would have been loads of wounded soldiers being brought back for care and recuperation.. Another source suggests *Chortitza* colony did not receive wounded soldiers for care till December of that year so these may have been sent further, perhaps to the *Molotschna* settlement, or somewhat further north to *Ekaterinoslav*. George K Epp, *Geschichte, Band II*, 93ff.

²⁶ This appears to have been a voluntary fund-drive to obtain war support monies. The word of appreciation would have come from the office of Nicholas I who died the following year.

November 9 *Guardians' Committee directs Kh(ortitza) settlement to actively participate in the transport of 130,000 pud of zukharii to the Crimea.*

November 22. We delivered the *zucharii* to the *Schultz*. I had 33 *pud*.²⁷

December 1 *Molotschna Mennonites and Molotschna colonists (i.e.non-Mennonite) offer to nurse 1520 (?) soldiers until their complete recuperation.*

December 4 We had to transport English and French prisoners from Neuenburg to Jeixi (?). The *Anwohner* had to take 10 loads.²⁸

December 8 Our people left with the *zucharii* to Tanke (Tonka?) with 200 wagons, each taking 25 *pud*. Twenty one loads went from Neuendorf and returned on December 24.

December 9 *Two hundred Khortitza settlement wagons set out with loads of zucharii to Crimea.*

1855

January 4 *Alexandrovsk district government demands that the Khortitza volost repair the bridge between Schönwiese and Alexandrovsk.*

January 18 The *podvod* left for the Crimea on the 18th and 19th of February. Some drivers returned. Fourteen wagons stayed back there, having to transport the sick. Those came back on February 23rd and brought 200 wounded soldiers to Chortitza.

January 18 *Khortitza volost furnishes 400 wagons to transport to Crimea.*

February 19 The caravan left for Perekop. The *Anwohner* had to contribute also. I gave one horse. They returned on March 13 and had been only as far as Berislav. Expenses for each amounted to 11 R(ubels) 20 K(opeks).²⁹

²⁷ *Zukharii* was roasted bread, in this instance, perhaps for use by transport drivers, or taken in larger ordered quantities to the soldiers on the front. Roasting bread preserved it for relatively long periods of time. Large quantities of bread provisions were produced in this way but an 1855 report by Phillip Wiebe in *Mennonitische Blätter* on the total pud requested (130,000) is questioned in George K Epp, *Geschichte, Band II*, 109. It is not noted which other communities were also involved in the production and transport of the bread.

²⁸ This may need to be understood as paying their predetermined contribution per load, since the *Anwohner* did not normally provide wagons and provisions otherwise, though they could have been the drivers.

²⁹ It appears that the author of this diary was himself an *Anwohner*, hence could record detailed information about their involvement. Berislav was in the region which Vice-regent Potemkin granted to the Mennonites of Prussia and Danzig in the first negotiations held with the land scouts, Jakob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch. in 1787. Later he reneged on his promise, giving as a reason the ongoing struggles with the Turks in the region. Instead he consigned the new settlers to a piece of land which he owned in the Chortitza area of the Dnieper River. See Lawrence Klippenstein, "Four Letters to Susanna", 44-59.

May 4 The sick soldiers arrived in Neuendorf. They numbered 84 and among them were wounded.³⁰

June ? Cholera broke out. Johan Regier was the first to die of this illness in Neuendorf. On the 13th Andreas Sachub, Jakob Dueck's tenant, died.

July 12 The wounded soldiers left.

November 22 Our caravan (*podvod* transport) left for the Crimea with 20 loads of hay from the landholders (*Wirthen*) and 8 loads from the *Anwohner*.. On the first day it was very windy and cold. It was very windy and stormy on the 2nd (day). Calm and mild on the 3rd.

November 22 .Our caravan left for the Crimea with hay. Our wagons came back on December 20 with one dead. The trip expenses for 21 days are 193 R(ubles), 12½ K(opeks), for each one minus the Crown money which made it 9.R(ubles) 29 K(opeks).

Expenses 15 R(ubles) 96 K(opeks), The rest of the wagons returned after 38 days on December 22nd.³¹

.....

1856

January 18 The caravan left for the Crimea with 10 loads of hay from Neuendorf.

February 5 Our caravan left for the Crimea with 5 loads of hay from the *Anwohner*. They returned having been away-----days. Each one's cost was ----minus the Crown money which left -----.

1858

March 23 600 Crimean soldiers are quartered in the village of Neuendorf.³²

³⁰ This statement strongly suggests that many of these men, perhaps the majority, were suffering from various diseases, possibly including cholera. Local residents no doubt realized the danger of spreading diseases and will have taken measures to protect themselves. However we find frequent scattered references to *podvod* workers becoming ill and an unrecorded total number dying of disease.

³¹ The references to 21 and 38 days in this entry are puzzling. The dates of departure and return for this *podvod* would suggest a 30-day round trip for those taking longest to make it. Of course, unpredicted delays could easily alter expected duration of trips taken.

³² The entry for 1858 appears to be an error since it was made so long after the war ended. One might think demobilization would have been far advanced by this time. Information about the end of hostilities may have been slow to get around, leaving such troop movements still in progress. A further discussion of the diaries material is found in George K Epp, *Geschichte, Band II*, 88-94.

Governing authorities were generally quick to acknowledge and ultimately to highly praise these Mennonite contribution, and the national loyalty and affirmation of the tsar which these actions implied. Letters of gratitude and recognition for services rendered came from high places in both military and civil services. It has been calculated that Mennonite recipients of medals and related awards given out to leaders in various colonist and Mennonite settlements outnumbered those given to other groups. Such official recognition would later be recalled when the Mennonites in Russia found themselves accused of being less than fully patriotic in the pre-World War I years and during the war itself.

War Outcomes for the Mennonites

Nicholas I passed away in March, 1855, and Sevastopol was surrendered in September that same year. The new tsar, Alexander II (1855-1881), sought to end the war as quickly as possible. Peace negotiations with the West European Allies took place in Paris at the end of his first year in office. All the main powers involved gave their signatures to the Treaty of Paris on March 30, 1856. Historians seem generally agreed that it marked a decided decline in influence of Russia in southeast Europe and the Near East, indeed, the world as a whole.

Mennonite participation in war-related activities may have continued, as the war-time diaries show, for much, if not all, of the rest of 1856. The total contributions of the Mennonite settlements (Chortitza, Molotschna, Bergthal) in south Russia (population ca 65,000) have not been calculated and it might be difficult to do so accurately. However, a number of lives were lost, some equipment was destroyed, and the financial contributions, taken altogether likely amounted to thousands of rubles in cash, with all the goods and voluntary services in kind adding tens of thousands more. There were some reimbursements from the government but the bulk of the *podvod*, hospital care, labour, and other expenses came from the Mennonites themselves.³³ Little opposition to providing support for the Crimean war effort had been registered during the years of military action, however, with a discernable patriotic enthusiasm making itself felt during that time.³⁴

In the short term, Russia did not need to view the war's outcome as a total defeat. All invading forces were withdrawn, and damages, though severe, were confined to a very small portion of the country. National leaders could not, however, avoid the realization that their troops had come off very badly. The tsar and many of his bureaucrats concluded immediately that something would need to be done about that soon.

For Mennonites the termination of duties and services related to the war effort no doubt came as a very welcome change. One may assume that on the surface at least, life soon resumed a relatively normal routine. Still, what had transpired left a deep imprint on

³³ For a brief summary of how the war ended in 1856, see Nicholas V. Riazonovsky, *A History of Russia: Fourth Edition* (New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 339. The range of expressions of thanks sent to Mennonites by Russian authorities is discussed in Urry and Klippenstein, "Crimean War," 22ff, and George K. Epp, *Geschichte, Band II*, 105ff.

³⁴ George K. Epp, *Geschichte, Band II*, 96-100. The existence of muted criticism of Mennonite war involvements, again from *Kleine Gemeinde* leaders, as had been the case during the war with Napoleon, is noted in sources cited in Urry and Klippenstein, "Crimean War," 25.

the colony with various positive and negative results into coming into sharper focus before much time elapsed.³⁵

The *podvod* experiences and other connections with military personnel, e.g. in hospitals, and exchanges with people met during their travels, brought Mennonites into contact with various classes of Russian people much more directly than had been the case earlier. Diaries and other personal accounts suggest that some of these encounters proved to be pleasant sometimes and at other times not so. The *podvod*ers themselves certainly derived a deeper awareness of the size and nature of the nation. Many came to identify with their country in a way they had not before. During this war they faced a common enemy that could mean uprooting and destruction for many of them, if the western Allies won.

Crimean contacts of various kinds revealed an attractive region of settlement for many landless families, as well as those looking for larger ventures of business and agriculture. It would not be many years before large land purchases were made in accessible areas along the railways and main travel routes, with numerous Mennonite communities springing up in the process. Following the lead of entrepreneur and community leader Johann Cornies, an estate owner and merchant trader in this area, Mennonites would soon increase their intercourse with Crimean towns and cities significantly.³⁶

Some of these war contacts would also help to create personal contacts with beneficial results later on. A case in point here emerged through a relationship with a high ranking Russian engineer, Adjutant Eduard Ivanovich von Totleben, who directed the defense of Sevastopol and became personally acquainted with Mennonites of the *podvods* during the war years. He would play a significant role in dealing with state issues that came to the fore among Mennonites later on again.³⁷ The highest authorities, including the royal court, came to see the Mennonites as gradually moving into the mainstream of Russian life. Hitherto they had lived more or less in isolation, i.e. colonists who, for the most part, were hardly aware of other Russians and Ukrainians except as peddlers, housemaids and labourers, and occasionally officials who maintained legal and other networks needed for directing economic and political life.³⁸

³⁵ On early reactions to the failures of the Crimean conflict, and discussion about bringing about military reforms see Forrest A. Miller, *Dmitrii Miliutin and the Reform Era in Russia* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 26ff.

³⁶ Cornies (d.1848) had already succeeded in developing his estates and personal leadership through trading projects and intellectual pursuits that reflected a vision for strengthening relationships with Russian realities far beyond the confines of local village life. James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Winnipeg, Man.: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), 108ff. On the question of how the war affected Mennonites and Russia as a whole see also Friesen, *Autobiography*, 21ff.

³⁷ The most extensive treatment of the story of Mennonite settlement beginnings and subsequent developments in Crimea is still Martin Durksen, *Die Krim war unsere Heimat* (Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press jointly with the author, 1977). See also Lawrence Klippenstein, "Crimea, Mennonites in," *Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union*, (1995), Vol. 6, 131-133, and Helmut Huebert, *Crimea: The Story of Crimea and the Mennonites Who Lived There* (Winnipeg, Man.: Springfield Publishers, 2013). A 1957 study is now available in an English translation of the Echo Historical Series, H.Goerz, *Mennonite Settlements in Crimea*, trans. by John B Toews (Winnipeg, Man.: CMBC Publications, 1992).

³⁸ Urry and Klippenstein, "Crimean War," 24ff. There seems to be no available evidence for Mennonite requests to have their *Privilegia* of 1787 and 1800 confirmed yet again by Alexander II when he became the new tsar. See Urry, *None but Saints*, 194ff, for a discussion of increasing social and economic

Looking ahead, it could be argued that the war reshaped Mennonite history in Russia most definitively through the military and other reforms which ultimately did result in large measure from the Crimean fiasco. Other aspects of life such as the serf situation cried for attention too, as did the educational system and other areas of administration and state services. They may have seemed less threatening to Mennonites but affected them nonetheless.³⁹ Concerted plans for bringing about changes in all these sectors of Russian life gave to Alexander II the label of “reformer” tsar. Proposals for reaching these new goals by and large did not look to the Mennonites like programs that would benefit them very much, least of all the improvements projected for the armed forces of the country.

problems which Mennonites faced in their own communities in the post-Crimean War period. The alleged isolation of Mennonites in Russia has sometimes been exaggerated. The wealthier class, for one, appreciated many wider contacts in Russian society, literary persons connected with Russian writers to a degree, and contacts developed through higher education, albeit only in later years, were all factors for assimilation at least in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

³⁹ The reader is referred here to a broader study of Mennonite resistance to Russian military service in Klippenstein, “Mennonite Pacifism,” 43ff, and a published version of the relevant section, in Lawrence Klippenstein, “Broken Promises or National Progress: Mennonites and the Russian State in the 1870s,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Volume 18, 2000, 95-113. As has been mentioned the contributions of Mennonites to support the Crimean war campaigns would later be recalled when, during WWI particularly, the loyalty of Mennonites to the tsar and Russia came to be seriously questioned.

To what extent these “reminders” affected petitions made in this later period in the interests of preserving the Mennonite *Privilegium* and their traditional rights generally, e.g. as landholders, is difficult to judge. As a struggle emerged among Mennonites of Russia in the 1870s over how to respond to new universal conscription legislation, it did become clear that not all of them had supported the supply system worked out with *podvods*, along with care of wounded soldiers and hauling supplies to the front, even if they did not voice their resistance publicly at the time.