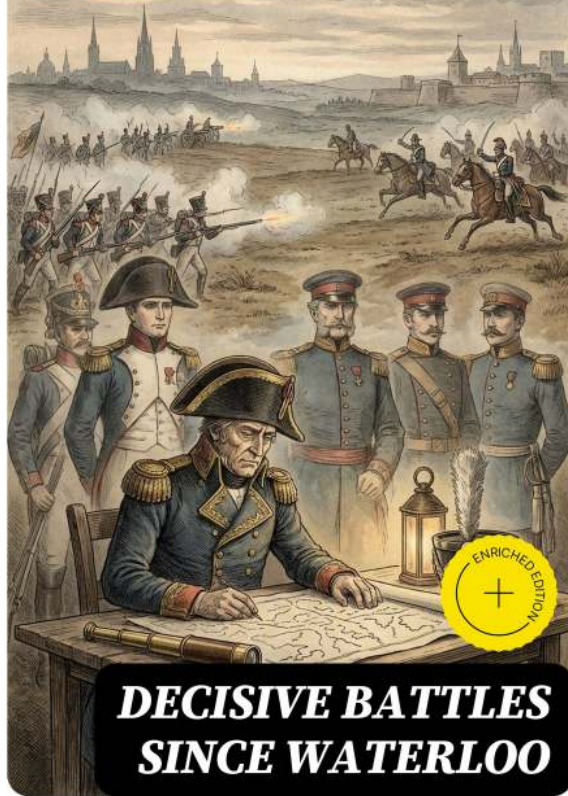


**THOMAS
WALLACE KNOX**



**DECISIVE BATTLES
SINCE WATERLOO**

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WALLACE KNOX**



ENRICHED EDITION
+

**DECISIVE BATTLES
SINCE WATERLOO**

Thomas Wallace Knox

Decisive Battles Since Waterloo

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Tyler Ashford

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Introduction

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In *Decisive Battles Since Waterloo*, Thomas Wallace Knox explores how, in the turbulent years after 1815, the destinies of nations repeatedly turned upon crowded fields where individual decision and massed force intersected with shifting ideas, institutions, and technologies, revealing a modern age in which power, identity, and contingency contended in deadly balance and where the results of a single day's fighting could reverberate far beyond the smoke and din to alter diplomacy, redraw frontiers, and reshape public imagination, even as they exposed the limits of command, the stubborn weight of circumstance, and the enduring human costs of strategic ambition.

Knox's work belongs to the tradition of narrative military history, assembled in the nineteenth century for a general readership and oriented toward explaining the era's pivotal clashes after the fall of Napoleon at Waterloo. Written from within that century's intellectual climate, it surveys campaigns across multiple regions without venturing into arcane technicalities, yet it keeps one eye on the battlefield and the other on its political stakes. The setting is the wider post-Napoleonic world, in which empires, emerging nation-states, and reforming armies contest influence, and the publication context reflects the period's appetite for synoptic, instructive accounts.

The premise is straightforward and compelling: follow a sequence of major engagements since 1815 and study why

they mattered, how they unfolded, and what patterns they display when considered together. Readers encounter concise episodes rather than an exhaustive annal, each framed to illuminate causes, commanders' choices, and immediate consequences while avoiding needless digressions. Knox's voice is assured, direct, and explanatory, with a reporter's eye for telling detail and a historian's concern for coherence. The tone is sober and didactic, privileging clarity over ornament, and the pacing alternates between brisk summaries of movement and reflective pauses that underscore broader significance.

The reading experience blends narrative momentum with strategic analysis. Knox introduces the political pressures that bring armies to the field, sketches the ground and the forces in play, and then follows the action with a focus on key decisions, coordination, and timing. Rather than drowning the reader in exhaustive order-of-battle lists, he emphasizes cause and effect, the interplay of preparation and surprise, and the ways morale, discipline, and leadership shape outcomes. The result is a series of linked case studies that invite comparison, teaching readers to see beyond spectacle to the mechanics of power and the anatomy of risk.

Several themes recur with cumulative force. The idea of a "decisive battle" is tested against the stubborn realities of aftermath and unintended consequences, reminding readers that victory and resolution are not synonyms. Knox foregrounds the relationship between battlefield events and political settlements, the limits of heroic leadership when confronted by logistics and organization, and the recurrent

tension between doctrine and improvisation. He also shows how language, culture, and national aspirations inflect strategic choices, and he traces how public expectations—shaped by newspapers and civic pride—enter the calculus of commanders who must answer to governments as well as to history.

For contemporary readers, the book offers both a window and a mirror: a window into how a nineteenth-century observer organized the world's most consequential fights after Waterloo, and a mirror that reflects our own assumptions about what "decisive" means in modern conflict. Its survey highlights continuity in war's fundamentals while hinting at transformation in scale, coordination, and the widening political effects of combat. Engaging it critically reveals how narratives elevate certain episodes to canonical status, how metrics of success evolve, and how strategic lessons migrate—sometimes wisely, sometimes perilously—across time and geography.

This introduction to Knox's project invites a measured reading that appreciates the clarity of his synthesis while remaining alert to its perspective and limits. Approach each chapter as both a story and an argument about causation, remembering that the designation of a battle as decisive is itself a judgment shaped by context. The book's enduring value lies in its accessible mapping of the post-1815 landscape of war and statecraft, its reminder that decisions under pressure carry consequences beyond calculation, and its capacity to provoke debate about the relationship between combat, policy, and the narratives that bind them.

Synopsis

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Thomas Wallace Knox's *Decisive Battles Since Waterloo* presents a nineteenth-century survey of warfare in the years following the 1815 defeat of Napoleon. Writing as a historian and observer of his time, Knox assembles a sequence of engagements he deems pivotal to the political and military transformations that shaped the century. The book traces developments from the immediate aftermath of Waterloo through later upheavals, and anchors each episode in its broader context of diplomacy, state ambitions, and popular movements. Its central premise is that specific battles, by resolving campaigns at critical junctures, redirected national destinies and reconfigured the international order.

Knox's approach balances concise narrative with interpretive framing. He outlines the stakes that draw powers into conflict, identifies principal commanders and forces, and traces the decisive moments that determined outcomes. The selection emphasizes engagements whose results extended beyond tactical success to produce lasting political consequences, whether by consolidating regimes, advancing national unifications, or prompting diplomatic realignments. Rather than dwelling on exhaustive technical detail, the account underscores cause-and-effect relationships between battlefield decision, morale, and strategic position. Throughout, Knox uses comparison across theaters to illustrate recurring problems of leadership,

coalition coordination, and timing in wars fought under rapidly changing conditions.

Beginning with the post-Napoleonic settlement, the narrative follows how the restored balance was repeatedly tested. Knox situates early engagements within movements for autonomy and the struggles of empires to maintain authority. He treats confrontations that arose from the tension between conservative order and emerging national aspirations, showing how outcomes on the field reshaped negotiations at congresses and courts. Battles on Europe's frontiers and coasts, and in regions seeking self-determination, expose the fragility of the settlement and the limits of intervention. The story emphasizes how even ostensibly local victories could reverberate widely when they altered perceptions of legitimacy and power.

As the century advances, the focus turns to wars that drew in multiple great powers and tested new organizational strains. Knox recounts campaigns that compelled states to adjust strategies to coalition warfare, defend extended lines of communication, and confront entrenched positions. Conflicts associated with ambitious programs of territorial reform and with high-stakes contests on sea and land highlight how shifting alliances and public opinion could influence operations as surely as troop maneuvers. In this middle section, the book tracks how decisive engagements precipitated diplomatic settlements, realigned borders, and set precedents for subsequent confrontations, while reinforcing the importance of preparation, logistics, and coherent political aims.

Knox devotes substantial attention to the American Civil War as a defining case in which the scale of mobilization and the duration of campaigns tested commanders and societies alike. He treats selected battles as studies in initiative, coordination, and the exploitation of terrain and momentum. The narrative follows how operational choices intersected with broader national purposes, and how the outcomes of particular engagements influenced domestic resolve and international perceptions. Without reducing the war to a single turning point, Knox identifies decisive clashes that clarified strategic trajectories and revealed the capacities and limits of leadership under unprecedented pressures.

In the closing chapters, the emphasis returns to Europe, where rapid shifts in power culminate in conflicts that restructure the continental balance. Knox examines engagements that advanced national consolidation and exposed vulnerabilities in long-standing empires, linking battlefield results to swift diplomatic settlements and changes in military prestige. He also considers fighting on the margins of Europe and in adjoining regions, where contests over influence and access produced hard-fought encounters with international repercussions. Taken together, these episodes suggest an accelerating tempo of change, with decisive battles serving as inflection points in struggles over sovereignty, modernization, and the legitimacy of political systems.

Across its sweep, the book presents a consistent argument about causality: decisive battles matter because they compress political conflicts into moments of irrevocable

choice. Yet Knox's survey also invites caution, showing that consequences unfold unevenly and that victory can impose unforeseen burdens. Read today, *Decisive Battles Since Waterloo* offers a window into nineteenth-century historical judgment and a compact guide to the century's most consequential confrontations. Its enduring value lies less in final answers than in the questions it poses about how military outcomes translate into durable change, and how narratives of decisiveness shape our understanding of the past.

Historical Context

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After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815, the Congress of Vienna sought to restore dynastic legitimacy and a balance of power among Britain, Austria, Prussia, Russia, and a cautiously re-admitted France. The "Concert of Europe" mediated conflicts through conferences and interventions, aiming to deter revolutionary upheaval and prevent a single hegemon. Industrialization reshaped economies and armed forces, while expanding literacy and mass newspapers broadened audiences for military reportage. This framework—post-Napoleonic diplomacy, bureaucratizing states, and accelerating technology—forms the starting point for Thomas W. Knox's survey of warfare, which tracks how decisive engagements interacted with institutions created to preserve order across nineteenth-century Europe and beyond.

Mid-century war in Crimea (1853-1856) exposed the fragility of the Concert and heralded modern methods. Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire fought Russia in campaigns from the Alma to the protracted siege of Sevastopol. Railways and the electric telegraph aided allied logistics and coordination; the Minié rifle increased infantry lethality. Public scrutiny intensified through battlefield dispatches, and Florence Nightingale's reforms professionalized military nursing. The war's costly lessons on supply, sanitation, and entrenchment influenced later European planning. For Knox, such battles exemplified how

technology and public opinion began to shape outcomes as much as dynastic alliances or traditional notions of generalship.

Revolutions in 1848 energized nationalism, propelling Italy's and Germany's unifications through war. In Italy, Franco-Piedmontese victories such as Solferino (1859) not only weakened Austrian influence but inspired Henry Dunant's humanitarian campaign, leading to the Red Cross (1863) and the Geneva Convention (1864). Prussia's military system, rail mobilization, and general staff under Helmuth von Moltke produced swift decisions at Königgrätz (1866) and Sedan (1870). The Franco-Prussian War toppled the Second Empire and culminated in Germany's proclamation at Versailles in 1871. These campaigns demonstrated how organized national power, breech-loading rifles, and steel artillery could rapidly alter the continental balance.

In the United States, the Civil War (1861-1865) tested industrial warfare, national mobilization, and command over vast theaters. Battles such as Antietam and Gettysburg, combined with Vicksburg's fall, shifted momentum to the Union, while the Emancipation Proclamation redefined the conflict's political aims. Ironclads and riverine fleets, the telegraph, railroads, and sustained field entrenchments foreshadowed later European practices. Extensive reporting and photography conveyed unprecedented images of combat to the public. The war's scale and casualty levels offered sobering case studies in logistics, attrition, and combined arms that contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic analyzed when assessing what made engagements "decisive."

Decisive battles of the period also unfolded amid imperial expansion. The Indian Rebellion of 1857 featured sieges at Delhi and Lucknow and led to the British Crown assuming direct rule in 1858. The Second Opium War (1856–1860) pushed open additional Chinese ports. In Africa, the Anglo-Zulu War (1879) produced dramatic reversals at Isandlwana and a well-publicized defense at Rorke's Drift. Britain's occupation of Egypt after Tel el-Kebir (1882) secured the Suez Canal's route. The Berlin Conference (1884–1885) formalized the "Scramble for Africa." Such campaigns reveal how European firepower and global communications framed "decisiveness" in colonial contexts.

The "Eastern Question" dominated diplomacy as the Ottoman Empire weakened. Naval victory at Navarino (1827) aided Greek independence, but later crises drew in rival powers. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 pivoted on attritional struggles at Plevna and the defense of the Shipka Pass. The preliminary Treaty of San Stefano expanded Russian influence and proposed a large Bulgaria; the Congress of Berlin (1878) revised these terms, recognizing the independence of Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro and reshaping Balkan boundaries. These confrontations highlighted how battlefield outcomes immediately triggered great-power bargaining, with territorial settlements as decisive as tactical victories.

Throughout the nineteenth century, innovations altered tactics and the meaning of decisiveness. Breech-loading and repeating rifles, rifled artillery, and early machine guns such as the Gatling increased firepower; the Maxim gun (1884) pointed to a new threshold. Railways, steamships, and

telegraphs compressed time and space, while ironclads and torpedoes transformed naval war. Professionalized general staffs and conscription systems enabled rapid mobilizations. The laws of war advanced through the Lieber Code (1863) and the Geneva Convention (1864). War reporting, illustrated weeklies, and photography expanded audiences. Knox's selections illuminate this shift from heroic charges to campaigns decided by planning, logistics, technology, and national will.

Thomas Wallace Knox (1835–1896) was an American author and journalist known for popular histories and travel narratives. Published in the late 1880s, *Decisive Battles Since Waterloo* surveys conflicts from 1815 to 1887 for a general readership. Its episodic structure, attention to commanders and turning points, and frequent references to equipment and organization reflect Victorian interests in leadership, science, and empire. The book's framing of "decisiveness" aligns with contemporary state-centric historiography while acknowledging the growing influence of mass armies, communications, and public opinion. As such, it offers a period lens on modern war's emergence and the geopolitical order it helped create.

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DECISIVE BATTLES SINCE WATERLOO.



CHAPTER I.

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BATTLE OF AYACUCHO—1824[9].

THE Napoleonic wars that terminated with the battle of Waterloo reduced the nations of Europe to a state of exhaustion, and for a considerable period thereafter there was little occupation for the soldier. England, France, Spain, Germany, and Russia were engaged in repairing the ravages of war, and by common consent there was a truce to arms and a halt in the work of organized destruction. But the wings of Peace, outstretched over Europe, were folded on the other side of the Atlantic, throughout all the vast region known as Spanish America. Mexico, Peru, Chili, and the other trans-Atlantic provinces of Spain sought to sever their connection with the Old World; one by one they achieved their independence through a series of wars that deluged the land with blood and threatened to leave it an uninhabited waste.

The final battle of the South American wars of independence was fought at Ayacucho, Peru, December 9, 1824. Let us first glance at the events which led up to that sanguinary conflict, and then consider the occurrences of the day which saw the Spanish power in America broken forever.

It is a curious circumstance that the South American revolutions had their beginning in the intense loyalty of the people of the Spanish-American colonies, and particularly of the United States of Colombia, for their king. In 1808 the armies of Napoleon were overrunning Spain; Ferdinand VII. was compelled to abdicate the throne, and Joseph

Bonaparte, brother of Napoleon, was proclaimed King of Spain and the Indies. Agents were immediately sent, in the name of the new king, to announce to the American colonies the abdication of Ferdinand and the elevation of Joseph to the throne. Joseph shrewdly promised to the viceroys and captains-general throughout the colonies, that they should retain their places, provided they acquiesced in the new order of things and induced the people to accept it. But though the officials were resigned to the situation, the people were not; they publicly burned the proclamations of King Joseph, expelled his agents, and insulted all Frenchmen then living in the colonies, so that most of them fled for safety.

In July, 1808, a French brig arrived at La Guayra, the port of Caraccas, with intelligence of recent events in France and Spain, including the abdication of Ferdinand and the accession of Joseph Bonaparte. The captain of the brig proceeded to Caraccas with despatches to the captain-general, and soon after his arrival the news from the Old World became known among the people. An English officer who was there at the time writes as follows:

The city was immediately in arms, 10,000 of its inhabitants surrounded the residence of the captain-general and demanded the proclamation of Ferdinand the Seventh as their king, which he promised the next day. But this would not satisfy them; they proclaimed him that evening by heralds, in form, throughout the city, and placed his portrait, illuminated, in the gallery of the town-house. The French were first publicly insulted in the coffee-house from which they were obliged to withdraw, and the French captain left Caraccas, privately, about eight o'clock that night, escorted by a detachment of soldiers, and so saved his life, for, about ten o'clock, his person was demanded of the governor by the populace, and when they learned that he was gone, three hundred men followed him to put him to death.

About the same time a French brig arrived at Buenos Ayres with an envoy from Napoleon carrying despatches to

Liniers, the viceroy, who issued a proclamation announcing the events which had occurred in Spain, and advising the people to submit to the authority of Joseph Bonaparte. The proclamation was coldly received by the people; the governor of Monte Video accused Liniers of disloyalty, disregarded his proclamation, established a *junta*^[1] or governing body for his province, and withdrew it altogether from the authority of Liniers.

In spite of the efforts of the viceroys and other officials to convince the colonies that every thing was quiet in Spain, it became known among the people that the peninsula was in a state of insurrection against the authority of Joseph Bonaparte, that in some provinces he was openly defied, and provincial juntas had assumed the management of affairs. The one at Seville proclaimed itself the supreme junta of Spain and the Indies, and sent deputies to the colonies requiring an acknowledgment of its authority. In order to secure this acknowledgment it announced that it was recognized and obeyed throughout Spain, which was far from being the case. At the same time the junta of the Asturias opposed that of Seville; the regency of Ferdinand claimed to have supreme authority; and to complicate matters still further Joseph Bonaparte had been proclaimed king. There were therefore four kinds of authorities to which the colonies were required to give allegiance; they were ready to recognize any proper authority of Spanish origin, and while they differed as to their proper course between the various juntas, they were all agreed in their hatred for the French.

The efforts of the viceroys and their subordinates to secure colonial allegiance to Joseph Bonaparte led to collisions between the populace and the authorities in several cities, and finally to open warfare. Owing to the disorders in Spain there was no central power which the colonies could respect, and this circumstance led to the formation of juntas of their own. The first was in Quito in 1809, but it was suppressed by the viceroy; the second was at Santa Fé de Bogota in the same year, and many of its members were imprisoned and afterwards massacred in cold blood. Similar scenes were enacted in other parts of the colonies, and tended greatly to weaken the authority of the mother country. Naturally the colonists asked the question, "What will become of us if Spain falls completely under the domination of France?" The discussion of the question naturally led to independence, and it is easy to see how a struggle which began in extreme loyalty to Ferdinand VII. and the government he represented, could develop into a battle for complete independence. From 1808 to 1812 the French armies gained ground in Spain. There was little hope of a restoration of the Spanish power and the expulsion of the Bonapartes, and long before the disasters of Napoleon in Russia, and the consequent retreat of the French from Spain, the colonies were on the high road to absolute freedom from the yoke of their mother country.

The government of Joseph Bonaparte adopted repressive measures towards the colonies; troops were sent to awe the people into submission, the province of Caraccas was declared in blockade, and the colonial rulers were ordered to enforce obedience at whatever cost. After the retirement of

the French from Spain, the regency, which succeeded to Joseph Bonaparte, and after it the restored king, Ferdinand VII., continued the same measures, totally ignoring the loyalty which the colonies had originally displayed at the beginning of the French occupation. Nothing remained for the colonies but a war for independence, a war which terminated, as already mentioned, with the battle of Ayacucho, sixteen years after the first outbreak at Caraccas.

The story of the South American war of independence would fill many volumes. Juntas were established in Caraccas, Buenos Ayres, Santiago, and other South American cities widely separated from each other, during 1810, and the repressive measures adopted by the colonial authorities only added to the vigor of the movement. In Buenos Ayres the viceroy was deposed, and the powers of government were assumed by a junta acting in the name of the deposed and captive king, Ferdinand VII. From Buenos Ayres the disturbance extended to Chili, where another junta deposed the viceroy and assumed the reins of government; about the same time there was an insurrection in Upper Peru (now called Bolivia) and later another in Peru. From a state of tranquillity, in 1808, the whole of South America was in a condition of open or partial revolt in less than four years, with the single exception of Brazil.

Brazil was a colony of Portugal, not of Spain. In 1807, when Napoleon declared war against Portugal, its king, John VI., fled to Brazil, accompanied by many courtiers and followed by numerous emigrants. After the fall of Napoleon in 1815, Brazil was raised to the rank of a kingdom; John assumed the title of King of Portugal, Algarve, and Brazil,

44 A town at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in Illinois that served as a major Union supply, troop-assembly, and naval base early in the American Civil War (from 1861).

45 A heavily fortified Confederate position on the Mississippi River near New Madrid that resisted Union gunboat and land operations for about a month before being evacuated in early April 1862.

46 The riverside site on the Tennessee River where the Battle of Shiloh (April 6–7, 1862) occurred; Union forces encamped there used the name Pittsburg Landing for the position.

47 Also called Arkansas Post, a Confederate fort at the mouth of the Arkansas River that was taken by a combined Union army–navy assault on January 11, 1863, resulting in large numbers of prisoners and captured materiel.

48 Aspinwall was the 19th-century English name for the town now called Colón on the Atlantic (Caribbean) side of the Isthmus of Panama, a major transfer point for trans-isthmus travel and steamship lines in that era.

49 Fort Steadman was a Confederate fortification near Petersburg, Virginia; on March 25, 1865, Confederate forces under Gordon briefly captured it but were driven back, suffering significant losses and prisoners.

50 Five Forks was the April 1, 1865, battle in Dinwiddie County, Virginia, where Union forces led by Philip Sheridan won a decisive victory that helped break the Confederate right and precipitate the fall of Petersburg and Richmond.

51 A short-lived agreement between Prussia and Austria that temporarily divided administration of the contested

duchies after the Danish war, assigning Holstein to Austria and Schleswig to Prussia; it was signed on August 14, 1865 and intended as a provisional arrangement to ease tensions.

52 Refers to Count Alexander von Mensdorff-Pouilly (c.1813–1894), who served as Austrian foreign minister in the mid-1860s and exchanged the diplomatic correspondence with Otto von Bismarck mentioned in the text.

53 A member of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen family who, in July 1870, was proposed as a candidate for the vacant Spanish throne; his nomination and quick withdrawal helped trigger the diplomatic crisis that led to the Franco-Prussian War.

54 The French minister (ambassador) to Prussia at the time—Vincent, Count Benedetti—whose retirement from Berlin after a dispute with Prussian authorities was one of the immediate diplomatic incidents preceding France's declaration of war in July 1870.

55 Patrice de Mac-Mahon (Duc de Magenta) was a French marshal who commanded the Army of Châlons and led the forces at Sedan; he was wounded early in that battle and later served as President of the French Republic (1873–1879).

56 François Achille Bazaine was a French marshal who commanded the Army of Metz, which was besieged and immobilized at Metz during the 1870 war, preventing his relief by MacMahon's force at Sedan.

57 Mitralleuses were early rapid-fire guns or volley-weapons used by the French in the Franco-Prussian

War, a precursor to later machine-guns and distinct from ordinary field artillery.

58 Yermak was a late 16th-century Cossack leader who led an expedition across the Ural Mountains into Siberia, an action traditionally dated to the 1580s that initiated large-scale Russian conquest and colonization of Siberia.

59 This phrase denotes the Cossack communities based on the Yaik (now called the Ural) River; these semi-autonomous frontier cavalry settlers in Imperial Russia performed military service, raiding and local administration from roughly the 16th to 19th centuries.

60 The Amou Darya, historically called the Oxus, is a major Central Asian river that fed the irrigated oases (including the Khiva area) and historically drained toward the Aral Sea; it is a principal geographic feature in accounts of Central Asian travel and warfare.

61 Irregular Ottoman auxiliaries recruited in the 19th century, often unpaid and notorious for indiscipline and atrocities; they were used as light cavalry and militia rather than regular army units.

62 A mid-19th-century American-designed breech-loading infantry rifle noted for longer effective range than many contemporary Russian muskets; the exact model and specifications varied by service and conversion.

63 Refers to the German firm Krupp (Friedrich Krupp and successors), a major 19th-century manufacturer of steel artillery and armaments whose steel guns were widely exported and used by the Ottoman army.

64 The senior Russian imperial commander of the Army of the South in the 1877–78 Russo-Turkish War, commonly

identified as Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich; historical sources sometimes distinguish him from other family members with the same name.

65 Geok Tepe is a fortified oasis in the Kopet-Dag/Kara Kum region (in present-day Turkmenistan) and was the site of the major 1881 siege and capture by Russian forces that extended Russian control in Central Asia.

66 Skobelev (often spelled Skobelev) refers to General Mikhail D. Skobelev, a prominent Russian military commander noted for his roles in the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78) and for leading the Central Asian campaign that captured Geok Tepe.

67 A desert province on the Pacific coast originally administered by Bolivia in the early 19th century; rich in nitrate and mineral deposits, large portions of the coastal Atacama region came under Chilean control as a result of the War of the Pacific (1879–early 1880s) and subsequent treaties.

68 An older name for sodium nitrate (saltpetre), a naturally occurring mineral widely mined in 19th-century South America for use as a fertilizer and in the manufacture of explosives; large deposits in the Atacama/Tarapacá deserts were an important economic prize.

69 The Peruvian naval commander of the ironclad Huascar during the War of the Pacific, celebrated in Peru for his conduct in action and who was killed when the Huascar was captured on 8 October 1879.

70 El Obeid is the principal town of Kordofan in central Sudan (then part of the Egyptian Sudan) and was the scene