

Extract from Hinton, M., *Victory over Disease. Resolving the Medical Crisis in Crimean war, 1854–1856*, (Warwick: Helion, 2019), 105–11.

3.1.3 Smyrna

There was a small British hospital in Smyrna which provided for expatriates and sailors using the port but it was too small for military purposes. Clarendon ordered Stratford to procure additional hospital accommodation¹ and accordingly a Staff Surgeon and a Commissariat officer were sent to Smyrna to seek suitable facilities for a convalescent hospital.² They recommended a Turkish barrack located near the shore, and close to an ‘abundant market’.³ The building comprised a casement, which was deemed unsuitable for patients, and two upper stories which could accommodate 520 patients with safety,⁴ as well as a large number of attendants. (Figure 3.4: The hospital at Smyrna (From a sketch by Julian Portch). *Illustrated Times*, 24 November 1854, p.396). Quarters were available nearby for the medical staff.⁵

The hospital opened on 15 February 1855 and was staffed by military Medical Officers (MOs) until replaced by civilians during the course of March. Six hospital transports sailed there from Balaklava between 3 and 16 February, and, although all called at Scutari to disembark the worst cases,⁶ it soon became over crowded,⁷ necessitating a request for additional accommodation in a nearby barrack and lazaretto.⁸

It was suggested before the hospital opened that, notwithstanding the shortage of medical staff, it should not be used solely for convalescents as these were relatively few patients compared to the number of sick needing treatment.⁹ Initially there was a bias towards the less seriously ill, since during the first 2½ months to the end of April the ratio of deaths to admissions was 12 per cent as compared to 28 per cent in the Scutari hospitals.¹⁰ Thereafter the ratio was much reduced to 2 per cent,¹¹ thus confirming that Smyrna became a ‘convalescent station’, as was originally envisaged.¹² A sensible policy given that the long voyage from the Crimea ‘should not be thought of’ both for those in ‘the trying state of a severe disease [or] severe surgical cases.’^{13, 14}

¹ Newcastle to Raglan, 11 December 1854; TNA: WO 6/70/712 and Cabinet paper; Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre: 2057/F8/III/C/65.

² Departmental Order issued by the PMO, Scutari, 20 December 1854; TNA: FO 195/452

³ FO 195/456. Staff Surgeon Moorhead’s report is reproduced in Smith, *Précis of Letters*, 1, Appendix III. The barrack building is depicted in *Illustrated London News*, 1855, I, p.472.

⁴ It was suggested that there would be 2,000 beds; *The Lancet*, 27 January 1855

⁵ Hospital Superintendent to Panmure, March and 14 April 1855; Reports on Hospitals in Turkey, pp.54–6.

⁶ These comprised *Adelaide* (173 men), *Emeu* (155), *Melbourne* (151), *Brandon* (120), *Medway* (196), and *Tynemouth* (301). Of these 11 died during the voyage across the Black Sea and 96 were disembarked at Scutari; *Medical and Surgical History*, 2, pp.469–470 & 479. Incidentally, Cumming, the PMO, pointed out to Smith on 28 April 1855 that the policy of disembarking the worst cases at Scutari would result in fewer patients dying at Smyrna; Reports on Hospitals in Turkey, p.46.

⁷ *Medical Times and Gazette*, 24 March 1855 based on information dated 3 March.

⁸ Paulet to Stratford, 21 February and Storcks to Stratford, 1 March 1855; TNA: FO 195/452.

⁹ Lawson to Smith, 28 January 1855; Smith, *Précis of Letters*.

¹⁰ Enclosure of the cemetery with masonry for £93/-/12d was authorized; Panmure to Storcks, 15 September 1855; TNA: WO 6/71.

¹¹ The principal causes death were diarrhoea or dysentery (67 cases), fever (38), frostbite (18), scurvy (14), and respiratory disease (11); *Medical and Surgical History*, 2, General Hospital Returns VIII.

¹² For example, Herbert to Cumming, 5 January 1855; Wiltshire and Swindon Record Centre: 2057/F8/III/C/15.

¹³ *The Lancet*, 24 February 1855 and *Medical Times and Gazette*, 23 August 1855.

¹⁴ Dr Spencer Wells, a naval surgeon employed in a civilian capacity, noted in a letter dated 16 June 1855 that the ‘length of the voyage from Balaklava to Constantinople is generally about thirty hours. It is

Paulet visited Smyrna in June and told Raglan privately that ‘a civil hospital [was in no way] advantageous; it is very expensive, and it certainly does not improve the discipline of our soldiers.’ He continued by saying that both Smyrna and Abydos ‘required many things doing for [the soldiers’] comfort’ and ‘we have comfortable accommodation for nearly 3,000 sick [at Scutari]’ though he suggested that ‘the distant hospitals should be kept in case of [increased demand, although it involved] a great deal of trouble when men are at a distance, and Smyrna lays quite out of the regular line of ships from and to England.’¹⁵

Incidentally, Panmure informed Paulet during March that the high summer temperatures at Smyrna may hinder recovery¹⁶ and that this may account in part why there were no sailings from Balaklava after *Sydney* and *Brandon* departed at the end of April until *Severn* and *Imperador* left on 26 October 1855, although both called first at Scutari.¹⁷ This would appear to be in response to an instruction from the Deputy Secretary since Hall informed Storks that: ‘His Lordship’s [Panmure] orders will be complied with, when the hospital ships now fitting are ready for the reception of sick but the distance of Smyrna and Renkioi is a drawback to their usefulness and if they are to be occupied an additional quantity of sick transport will be required.’¹⁸

Hall also suggested to Smith that the reasons the Deputy Secretary gave for sending patients to Smyrna ‘would amuse you [...] It was not that they were requiring accommodation, but the expensive civil establishment employed by government might have occupation.’¹⁹

At the end of October Storks informed the QMG [Airey] that the Secretary of State’s instructions had been put into effect and the transfer of 377 and 215 patients to Smyrna and Renkioi had resulted in 2,228 beds being available at Scutari.²⁰ Smith was subsequently informed of these developments,²¹ and there the matter rested as the hospital closed at the end of the month and was handed over to the British Swiss Legion which was based in Smyrna from the beginning of December 1855 until the end of the war.

The development of the hospital at Smyrna was essentially a political initiative, first mooted quite reasonably when matters were pressing, and Newcastle, the minister at the time, seemingly intending that it should be used for convalescents.²² His successor, Panmure, thought differently as he considered that the civilian medical staff should obtain worthwhile practical experience, particularly as they had become his responsibility following Smith’s refusal to be involved on the grounds that it was a civilian and not a military undertaking.²³

Panmure’s aspirations for success resulted in a tendency for him to interfere in the day to day running of the Army; a style of management that was generally unwelcome. For

about fourteen hours further to the hospitals on the Dardanelles, and another sixteen or eighteen hours to Smyrna’; *Medical Times and Gazette*, 30 June 1855.

¹⁵ Paulet to Raglan, 22 June 1855; TNA: WO 28/186.

¹⁶ Panmure to Paulet, 5 March 1855; TNA: WO 6/70. Incidentally, Nightingale considered it would be untenable within a month of her writing to Herbert on 26 March; McDonald, *Florence Nightingale*, p.172.

¹⁷ *Medical and Surgical History*, 2, p.479.

¹⁸ Hall to Storks, 9 October 1855; RAMC: 397/F/CO/1/2/3340. There is no despatch from Panmure on this matter in TNA: WO 6/71.

¹⁹ Hall to Smith, 10 November 1855; S.M. Mitra, *The Life and Letters*, pp.401–2. Hall suggested that the Deputy Secretary had intervened to avoid awkward questions in Parliament; though there is no record any were posed.

²⁰ Storks to QMG, 30 October 1855; TNA: WO 28/186.

²¹ Undersecretary to Smith, 5 November 1855; Smith, *Précis of Letters*.

²² Diary entry following a visit, 13 July 1855; University of Nottingham, Ne/2F/10/1.

²³ For example, Smith to Military Undersecretary, 23 Mar 1855; Royal Commission Report, Appendix LXXIX, p.45 and Smith to Deputy Secretary, 16 June 1855; Smith, *Précis of Letters*.

example, Brevet Major G.L. Goodlake wrote home on 10 January 1856: ‘Panmure sends out insulting rubbishing idiotic messages, which are ludicrous and ridiculous. I don’t believe Codrington could send 500 men anywhere without being obliged to telegraph home to know if he might do so.’²⁴

The Medical Department was not spared similar interference as evinced by a letter sent to Hall by the Deputy Secretary on 30 March, which suggested Panmure had adopted a policy diametrically opposed to the one promulgated during Aberdeen’s administration.²⁵

[In] organizing the civil hospital at Smyrna it was expressly stated that the successful realization of the plan will very much depend upon the class of patients to be admitted. If the hospital were [...] for chronic cases and convalescents the best men would be deterred from undertaking the duties of physicians and surgeons. [It is] essential that the civil hospital should [...] receive its fair proportion of all cases including wounded directly from the Army. [...] Lord Panmure [instructs] you to charter ships direct to Smyrna which will carry the sick thither without [stopping] in the Bosphorus,²⁶ [...] Colonel Storcks, the commandant at Smyrna, has been instructed to report to you the number of available beds from time to time.²⁷

Hall forwarded the letter to the QMG and informed him that he had been directed to charter ships to convey sick direct from the Crimea to Smyrna. He continued: ‘at present we are not particularly pressed for hospital accommodation,²⁸ but if we were I neither know the number of beds they have in the hospital at Smyrna, nor if I did could I obtain the tonnage for the sick. I submit this letter, therefore, for consideration in case a necessity should arise for sending sick down to Smyrna.’²⁹

Heath, the AoT, also pointed out that ‘the vessels would have to be steamers of which there are none at present available for charter in this part of the world.’ He continued:

Between 1 and 18 April about 600 sick have been sent [...] to Scutari.³⁰ The six hospital steamers can convey rather more than 700 in each 10 consecutive daily period;³¹ [...] as every individual sent to Smyrna will be a deduction from the number for Scutari [...] I would propose that [...] the two smaller steamers should be appropriate to that service. There would then remain sufficient transport for 500 patients every ten days to Scutari [and] about 100 men a week could be sent to Smyrna.³²

²⁴ M. Springman, *Sharpshooter in the Crimea* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2005), p.166.

²⁵ TNA: WO 28/176. The letter was probably a response to a complaint from Meyer, the medical superintendent, who ‘considered it essential’ that they should receive a ‘fair proportion of all cases included wounded directly from the Army;’ see Cantlie, *A History*, 2, p.169.

²⁶ Hall’s authority did not extend to chartering transport vessels, and hence it is perplexing why this was suggested.

²⁷ The last paragraph on the original document was marked in pencil in the margin: ‘!!!’. See Smith, *Précis of Letters*, 1, Appendix XV for the text.

²⁸ It should have known in London by the third week of March that 1,300 beds were available at Scutari; Paulet to Panmure, 8 March 1855; Reports on Hospitals in Turkey, p.1. Incidentally, on 13 May Cumming informed Hall that there were 1,900 beds spare; National Army Museum: 2007–07–16–27.

²⁹ Hall to QMG, 15 April 1855; RAMC: 397/F/CO/1/2/1839 and TNA: WO 28/176.

³⁰ During this period *Sydney* (98 patients), *Brandon* (111), *Ottawa* (120), and *Severn* (180) sailed to Scutari; *Medical and Surgical History*, 2, p.471.

³¹ These vessels comprised *Australian*, *Brandon*, *Melbourne*, *Ottawa*, *Severn*, and *Sydney*; Smith, *Précis of Letters*, 1, Appendix XV.

³² Heath to QMG, 19 April 1855; TNA: WO 28/176.

Heath's letter was referred to Hall who reiterated that he 'did not know what number of spare beds there are at Smyrna, and he would not wish to recommend sick men to be sent there until this was ascertained.' He clearly considered the policy was unnecessary as there were '747 spare beds at Scutari.'³³ Hall subsequently replied to the Deputy Secretary on 24 April and informed him that he was not:

aware that the Smyrna Hospital had been established for the treatment of acute cases of disease, as it is rather too distant [...] for that purpose, [...] my impression was that it was [for] those [...] not improving. [...] I am of the opinion Smyrna will not be found a desirable locality either for fever cases or wounded men in the summer and autumn. With respect [to] me chartering ships for the conveyance of the sick direct from Balaklava to Smyrna [...] I have no means of carrying out the measures [as all ships are controlled by] the Admiral Superintendent.³⁴

The authorities in the Crimea responded in a limited manner to Panmure's wishes by sending *Brandon* and *Severn* to Smyrna on the 26 and 29 April with 99 and 97 patients respectively.³⁵

When Smith received copies of this correspondence he informed the Deputy Secretary that ordering ships for Smyrna not to stop on the Bosphorus was 'most objectionable' as if done regularly 'individuals will have to encounter [...] suffering which would not fall their lot if the vessels touch at Scutari [...] This measure [...] is alike required for the cause of humanity and for the good of the public,' although he did concede that the hospital should not be solely for 'slight or chronic cases.'³⁶

The issue did not end there, however, because a month later the Deputy Secretary requested Smith 'to give an opinion whether the ships should stop at Scutari while quarantine laws still operate and as the hospital arrangements at Balaklava are now intended to provide for all acute and urgent cases and so it would seem less necessary for the vessels to stop at Scutari where probably only convalescents will be sent.'³⁷ To this Smith stated that he was unaware that vessels touching at Scutari would be subject to quarantine at Smyrna, but he thought that 'even that would be a less evil than passing Scutari without calling there.'³⁸

Shortly after the war ended the Deputy Secretary appeared to do a U-turn when he conceded that though the selection of the patients for the civil hospital was in 'the hands of the medical men' in the Crimea 'special direction had been given on the type of patient selected' but the 'altered state of things that ensued quite prevented that being acted upon, and the large extension of hospital accommodation in the Crimea has prevented so a large a

³³ Hall to QMG, 20 April 1855; TNA: WO 28/176. Cantlie, *A History*, 2, p.170 considered that Hall's logic 'was unanswerable' but Mayer was 'annoyed, and made the invidious suggestion that Smyrna was not used because the Army medical officers were envious of its high standard compared with their own military hospitals.'

³⁴ Hall to Deputy Secretary, 24 April 1855; RAMC: 397/F/CO/1/2/1832 and Smith, *Précis of Letters*, 1, Appendix XV. The back of the Deputy Secretary's letter was annotated by the QMG 'Refer this correspondence to Dr Hall, who will now have the means of reply to the Deputy Secretary at War.'

³⁵ Hall to Deputy Secretary, 4 May 1855; RAMC: 397/F/CO/1/2/1832. It was not recorded whether the vessels called at Scutari or not.

³⁶ Smith to Deputy Secretary, 5 May 1855; Smith, *Précis of Letters* and Royal Commission Report, Appendix LXXIX, pp.52–3. Incidentally, Smith had already recommended to the Deputy Secretary on 23 May that vessels for Smyrna should touch at Scutari; Smith, *Précis of Letters*.

³⁷ Deputy Secretary to Smith, 6 June 1855; Smith, *Précis of Letters*.

³⁸ Smith to Deputy Secretary, 11 June 1855; Smith, *Précis of Letters*.

number being sent to either of the civil hospitals as was originally contemplated,³⁹ thus vindicating Hall's objection to the instructions from London which he made on both practical and humane grounds

There is no assessment of the hospital at Smyrna in the *Medical and Surgical History* though contemporary accounts were published, one by a physician and another by a lady nurse.⁴⁰

A summary from General Hospital Returns VIII in Volume 2 of House of Commons Parliamentary Papers 1857–58 [2434] XXXVIII.Pt.I.1 & XXXVIII.Pt.II.1: *Medical and Surgical History of the British Army which Served in Turkey and the Crimea during the War against Russia in the Years 1854-55-56.*

During the time the hospital in Smyrna was occupied as a British Military Hospital – February to November 1855 – there were 1,887 admissions and 154 deaths of which 127 (82.5%) occurred during the first two months. The principal causes were diarrhoea and dysentery (67, 43.5% of deaths), fevers (38, 24.7%), frostbite (18, 11.7%), scurvy (14, 9.1%), and respiratory disease (11, 7.1%).

³⁹ Paraphrased from the Deputy Secretary's evidence to the Select Committee on the Army Medical Department, 18 June 1856; *Select Committee on the Medical Department*.

⁴⁰ HCPP 1857 Session 1 (0.51) IX.673: *Report on Smyrna by George Rolleston, Late Assistant Physician to the British Civil Hospital at Smyrna and A Lady [Martha Nicol], Ismeer, or Smyrna and its British Hospital in 1855* (London: James Madden, 1856).