

The Civil War in America: the Observations of One of Britain's Most Famous Special Correspondents

William Howard Russell



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The author of this book, William Howard Russell, is renowned as the 'first modern war correspondent.' Even though his first experience of war reporting was in 1850 during conflict between Prussia and Denmark, Russell, an Irishman, first came to wider recognition as a 'Times' newspaper correspondent through his coverage of the Crimean War in 1854. His dispatches from the Crimea became massively influential because, for the first time, the public were able to read about the realities of life and death on campaign and on the field of battle. This earned Russell the antipathy of the command structure, but the affection of the troops, for his honesty and candour, his generosity and sociable nature. His words inspired Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole to create proper medical care facilities for British troops which transformed the nature of military medical care in the British Army. Russell witnessed the most significant actions of the war, including the charge of the Light Brigade, and it was he who brought the phrase 'the thin red line' into the English language. The Indian Mutiny erupted in 1857 and Russell travelled to the sub-continent arriving in time to witness the final recapture of Lucknow. In 1861 the next great story was 'breaking' across the Atlantic, so Russell sailed to the United States to report on the American Civil War. His writings on the war to restore the Union are particularly interesting because Russell provided a non-partisan view combined with a wealth of experience in the observation of conflict and an ability to report it in well crafted journalistic copy. This is a book about war, but it is also a valuable collection of journalistic writing from an early master of the profession. There were many famous war correspondents after Russell but he was the first of his kind. His influence on the reporting of foreign affairs cannot be overestimated and that makes this book invaluable for military historians and those interested in the development of journalism.

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