

The China Relief Expedition

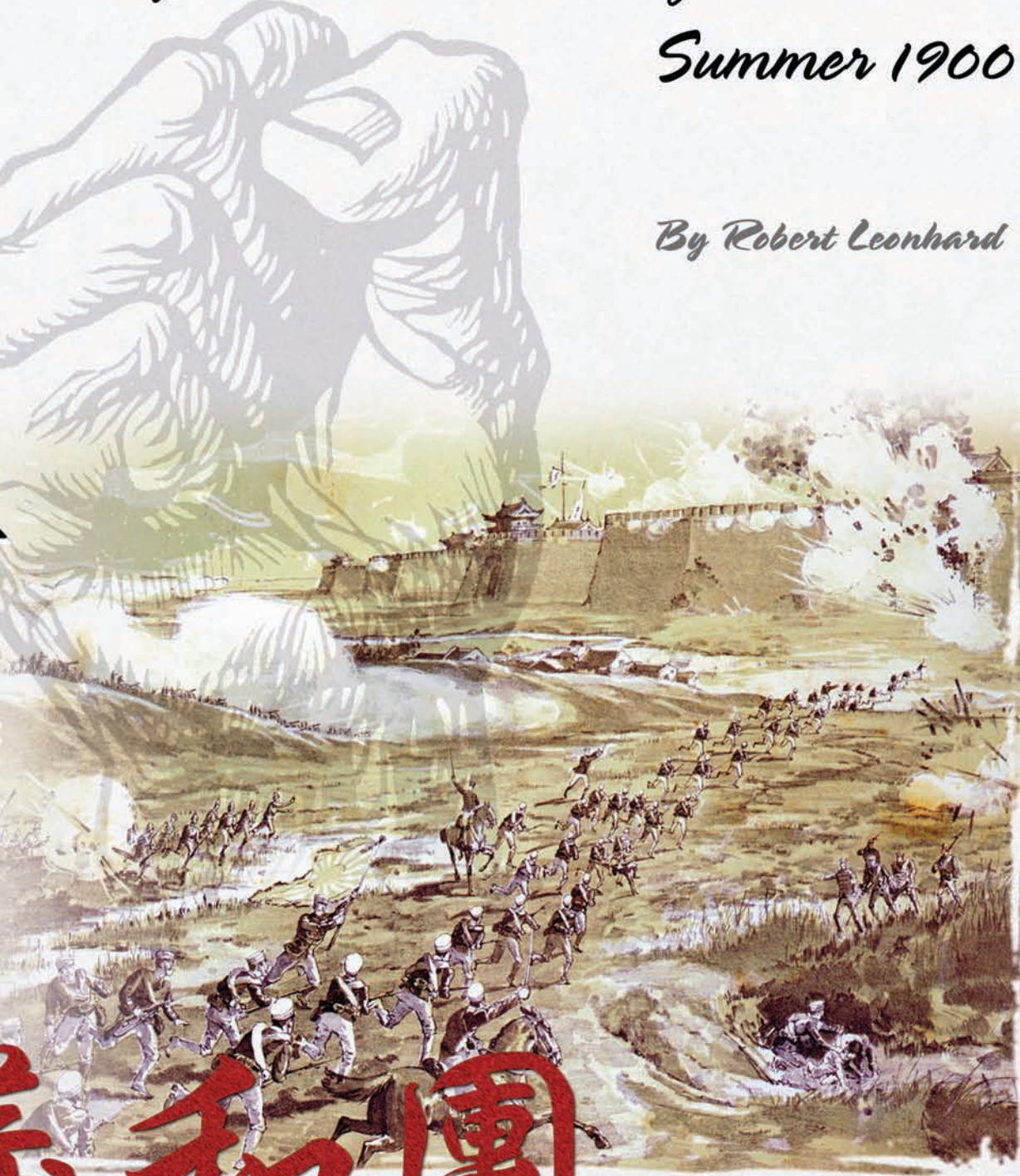
Joint Coalition Warfare in China

Summer 1900

By Robert Leonhard

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prepared by

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Foreign Concessions and Spheres of Influence
China, 1900



Introduction

The summer of 1900 saw the formation of a perfect storm of conflict over the northern provinces of China. Atop an anachronistic and arrogant national government sat an aged and devious woman—the Empress Dowager Tsu Hsi. Her unenviable task was to protect the dying and unpopular Manchu (or Qing) dynasty—the last of the Chinese dynasties—while simultaneously dealing with encroaching imperialist powers, chiefly Japan, Russia, and Great Britain, along with numerous lesser threats, including the United States. These nations wanted to secure their commercial interests in the Middle Kingdom, and to do so they were ready to build factories and railroads, pressure or bribe government officials, and, if necessary, use military coercion to obtain concessions. While tradesmen and generals were busily carving up the flesh and blood of China, Christian missionaries were wrestling for its soul. Catholics and Protestants were converting thousands to Christianity, threatening the Confucian and Buddhist underpinnings of Chinese society. The Empress was forced to sit and watch while foreigners gobbled up a proud but impotent ancient empire.

The roots of conflict between China and the West developed over three centuries of contact. Europe and China began trading in the sixteenth century, but the Chinese at first restricted merchant ships to the port of Canton and imposed high tariffs on imports, which in turn created a trade deficit. The mercantilist powers of Europe, where Chinese goods enjoyed high demand, were not content to see cash finding its way to distant shores. To balance the flow of silver, Great Britain began exporting opium produced in India to China in the eighteenth century and soon created a huge demand for the drug. In short order, the deficit had been reversed—much to China’s disadvantage—and opium addiction was ravaging Chinese society. By the nineteenth century, opium use and its trade were officially outlawed in China, but the lure of addiction, combined with the corruption that attends any lucrative trade, proved resilient to the Qing rulers’ official proclamations. When Peking attempted to forcibly stop the flow of opium, Great Britain reacted by going to war. The First Opium War (1839–1842) ended with China submitting to a humiliating treaty, allowing Britain to trade at several more ports, ceding Hong Kong, and allowing access to British missionaries.

A second war broke out (1856–1860)—this time with France joining Great Britain—when the pressures of growing international imperialism again pushed the Chinese too far. When Qing officials boarded a Chinese privateer and arrested twelve sailors on suspicion of smuggling, British ministers protested, claiming that the ship was sailing under British registry. The ensuing war brought about even worse defeats for China, including a decisive land battle in which Chinese forces, which outnumbered their European opponents by more than 10 to 1, were soundly defeated and routed. The victorious allied powers looted and burned the Imperial Summer Palace, and the treaty ending the war exacted further concessions for foreign powers. Imperialist Russia mediated an end to the conflict, but her price was a vast concession of several thousand acres of Chinese territory.

Despite the clear disadvantage China had in trying to defend herself against foreign incursions, the Manchus resisted any attempts at modernization that might threaten the privileged mandarin class or undermine the Confucian foundation of society. The real wake-up call came in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. Fought to determine who would control Korea, the war pitted the recently modernized Japan against China’s antiquated army and navy. The results were disastrous for China, and the Qing were forced into signing the Treaty of Shimonoseki, ceding control of Korea to the Japanese.

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Concerned about the increasing regional power of Japan, China signed a secret treaty of friendship with Russia the following year. The Tsar's ministers in China successfully posed as Peking's only friend against the incursions of the Japanese on the one hand and the Europeans on the other. The Qing were obliged, at least temporarily, to accept Russia's help. The Russians followed this foot in the door with a request for permission to build a trans-Manchuria railroad to Vladivostok. St. Petersburg would subsequently demand more land concessions.

As the century drew to a close, the government in Peking faced increasing challenges and pressures. War debts and corruption in the provincial governments caused a severe fiscal crisis in 1897. That same year, two German missionaries were murdered by a group of ruffians in Shantung Province. Berlin's response was a demand for reparations and the sudden seizure of Kiaochow. Russia joined in the scramble and took Port Arthur and Dairen. Soon Japan and the European powers jumped into the fray, each with demands for ports and land grants for railroads. Only Italy and the United States refrained from the orgy.

At the same time, the young and visionary Manchu emperor and nephew of Tzu Hsi, Kwang Hsu, decided upon a campaign of modernization that would match that of Japan's Meiji Restoration. He began to replace reactionary conservative officials with reform-minded scholars, decreed changes to the anachronistic civil service examination system, and set out to modernize the Chinese economy, military, and governmental bureaucracy. But his "hundred days of reform" threatened the interests of the entrenched mandarin class (high-ranking public officials) and offended the anti-foreign sentiments of many conservatives. Fortunately for them, the reactionaries had the ear of the emperor's aunt. The Empress Dowager promptly responded to their pleas by imprisoning her nephew and seizing the reins of government. Modernization ceased, while all around Peking the need for it grew.

The United States played a role in the growing China crisis as well. Although America did not occupy any ports herself, Americans benefited from the trade concessions gained by the other imperialist powers—chiefly France and Great Britain. The wave of missionary zeal that swept across the country in the nineteenth century brought about the arrival of hundreds of American missionaries to Chinese shores. Furthermore, the unforeseen acquisition of the Philippines from Spain gave the United States a convenient regional base. American strategy was aimed at leveling the economic playing field by ensuring equal access for all comers. Such an agreement would allow the continued economic exploitation of China while simultaneously preventing its physical dismemberment into enclaves of European and Japanese control. American Secretary of State John Hay articulated the philosophy in his famous Open Door notes of 1899 and 1900. The Europeans viewed the Americans' efforts with suspicion and contempt, but since the alternative was likely war and the instability of a disintegrated China, they acquiesced, and the Open Door policy became the de facto rule.

If the Chinese military could not resist foreign invasion, Chinese culture could. Although many Chinese were awed by Western military and economic power and others charmed by benevolent and passionate missionaries, there remained a constant undercurrent of loathing toward the foreigners. As early as the mid-eighteenth century, anti-foreign societies were operating to expel Westerners, or at least to minimize their presence. The anger directed at the Japanese, Europeans, and Americans at the end of the nineteenth century was eventually channeled into an obscure sect known as the I Ho Ch'uan—the Society of Righteous and

"Rifle or cannon bullets...may strike a Boxer in any part of his anatomy, but cannot penetrate the body of a sacred member of the I-Ho-Ch'uan. When hit, the bullet will bounce back without injuring him in the slightest degree."

—Declaration of Buddhist Monks, 1900

Harmonious Fists.¹ The “Boxers,” as they were called by the foreigners because of their practice of the martial arts, began to strike back at symbols of foreign presence: railroad stations, factories, trading houses, and missionaries. They showed special contempt and violence toward Chinese Christian converts, torturing and killing them by the tens of thousands. At first, the Imperial Court responded to the Europeans’ complaints against the Boxers by promising action to restrain them and apprehend the ringleaders. But before long, Tsu Hsi and her conservative advisors began to see the growing peasant militia as a useful tool for deflecting blame away from the government and for discouraging further foreign incursion.

Adorned with red sashes and scarves, the Boxers claimed to possess supernatural powers that rendered them immune to foreign bullets. They believed that through their rituals, they could call up spirits who would enter their bodies, turning them into powerful warriors against China’s foes. The Boxer cult spread rapidly from village to village, uniting the peasantry through a combination of dramatic rituals and empowering hate speech directed toward anything foreign. Occasionally, a group of Boxers would fire a Western firearm loaded only with powder at one of their members, demonstrating for the amazed onlookers the efficacy of their magic. Disenfranchised, poverty-stricken young men flocked to their red banners.²

The insurgency against the European presence in northern China fed off several key factors. The first was the language barrier. Because most Westerners found the Chinese languages inscrutable, they were often unaware of and unable to combat Boxer propaganda. Anti-foreign radicals openly denounced missionaries, claiming, for example, that the Europeans were stealing children and using their internal organs for Christian rituals and for medicines. Only in the aftermath of a massacre would the survivors learn that some outrageous rumor had sparked the violence.

Second, missionary activity—both Catholic and Protestant—caused severe disruption to Chinese society. The Christian missionaries demanded the cessation of ancestor worship and, of course, rejected the many gods and spirits that their converts had grown up with. But the cultural conflict transcended mere theology: missionaries also pressed for and obtained legal rights within China—rights that they used to construct churches and hospitals, sometimes in blatant disregard for the locals’ desires. The missionaries took pains to protect their flock from the depredations of their fellow Chinese, and this advocacy also occasioned resentment. Converts became known as “secondary devils” (i.e., next to the “primary devils,” the foreigners). The poorest Chinese Christian proselytes were derided as “rice Christians”—an allusion to the charge that they embraced the new religion in order to obtain food. The Boxers had an especially intense hatred for converts, who usually absorbed the worst of the anti-foreign violence. Even the positive influences the missionaries brought—better medicine and social services, for example—served to undermine the societal respect usually reserved for the mandarin class.

A third factor in the development of anti-foreign sentiment was the massive unemployment that resulted from Western technology. Steamships put Chinese river barges and their crews out of work. Railroads ruined the livelihoods of those in the land transportation industry. The

1 The precise meaning of the term is difficult to fix because of the nuances that emerge when translating from several different Chinese dialects. The secret society’s name itself also changed over the years for political reasons, and the society employed several subtle changes to the characters used in the spelling of the name. Hence, translations include variations such as “Volunteer United Fists,” “Volunteer Harmonious Band,” “Righteous, Harmonious Fists,” etc. See A. Henry Savage-Landor, *China and the Allies* (London: William Heinemann, 1901), pp. 1–2.

2 For an excellent source on the background to the Boxer uprising, see Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

unemployed became candidates for recruitment into the violent cults—especially the Boxers—that sprang up as the crisis of the late nineteenth century deepened.

In 1899, two unfortunate developments hastened the approaching conflict between China and the imperialist powers. The drought that year was exceptionally severe and resulted in thousands of peasants losing their farms and livelihoods. These disgruntled peons were ready recruits for the Boxers. At the same time, Yu Hsien became the governor of Shantung Province, and his policies were decidedly pro-Boxer. In December, a prominent British missionary, Sidney M. Brooks, was beaten and beheaded in Shantung. Boxer violence began to spread to adjacent provinces, and foreign ministers were peppered with pleas for help as reports came in of massacres and burnings. The Chinese Imperial Army—an extension of the vacillating Empress Dowager—at first opposed and then later cooperated with the Boxers.

By the summer of 1900, matters had come to a head. Hundreds of foreigners and their Chinese Christian allies were bottled up in the Tientsin concessions, and the diplomatic legations in Peking were likewise besieged. “Support the Qing! Kill the foreigner!” became the rallying cry of the Boxers, and the Empress Dowager made the fateful decision to fully ally herself and her dynasty with this growing, vigorous militia. The resolution of the crisis would see the beginning of the end of the Qing Dynasty, as well as the rise of both Japan and the United States as world powers.



The purpose of this essay is to examine the China Relief Expedition—the multinational force that marched to rescue the besieged diplomatic legations in Peking in the summer of 1900—through the eyes of the American participants. The coalition’s march to relieve the Peking legations was a remarkable operation. At the time, however, the China crisis was considered to be no more than a sideshow, even at its most serious in August 1900. The British were facing bloody stalemates in the co-synchronous Boer War, and although the United States had recently concluded the Spanish-American War (April–July 1898), which ended Spanish rule in the Philippines, the Americans were left to face the burgeoning insurgency there. The China Relief Expedition—once it got up steam—rapidly cut its way to Peking and brought the conflict to a decisive and bloody end. General Adna R. Chaffee commanded the American soldiers and Marines on what became one of the Americans’ first successful expeditionary campaigns. Along the way, he would have to contend with a line of communications that stretched from San Francisco through Manila and Nagasaki to the shores of China and then inland some hundred miles along primitive infrastructure.

Operating within a foreign society in which friend and foe looked identical, cultural sensitivities were at the boiling point, and the hot, humid weather alone could paralyze whole battalions, the allied forces also had to deal with each other. Conflicting plans sprang from equally conflicting agendas, and the closer the relief expedition got to Peking, the more ambitious the powers grew—each anxious to seize the advantage when the inevitable post-hostility diplomacy resumed. Chaffee and his officers, in close coordination with Washington, navigated through these challenges and demonstrated a robust competence in joint/coalition expeditionary warfare.

The China Relief Expedition was the first opportunity since the American Revolution for the U.S. Army and Marines to work with their foreign counterparts. There was no doctrine for

coalition warfare nor any provision made in the organization of headquarters or service support units. General Chaffee and his officers had to improvise and learn the art of cooperation on the fly. To aggravate the situation, most of Chaffee's staff had not worked together before meeting in China. Staff deficiencies in the regiments and battalions (the former authorized five officers, and the latter two) forced commanders to take officers from the line units. As units arrived ad hoc in China, Chaffee had to organize liaison teams to work with the many foreign headquarters, and language problems plagued him for much of the campaign. (Most headquarters were able to communicate in either English or French, however.) Furthermore, even though troop levels in the Philippines would grow from 40,000 to a high of 126,000 by 1901, Chaffee had only some 3,500 troops by the time the march to Peking commenced—troops grudgingly sent by General Arthur MacArthur, the American military governor in Manila, whose attention remained on the situation there.

The regular regiments of the American Army, having recently been expanded to accommodate the requirements of the war with Spain, were generally well trained. Prior to the conflict, the Army had engaged in the Indian Wars (1865–1898)—an experience that gave the participating officers a level of independence, self-reliance, and practical know-how but little understanding of large-scale conventional fighting. Army leadership understood that the constabulary role they had played in taming the American West was coming to an end, and they had created the School of the Application for Infantry and Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth in the 1890s. This led to the publication of professional journals, professional lyceums at Army posts, and other innovations aimed at transforming and modernizing the Army. European military science and technology inspired these efforts, as they had throughout America's history. Field exercises throughout the 1890s led to the adoption of open order tactics, but expertise in logistics failed to keep pace.³

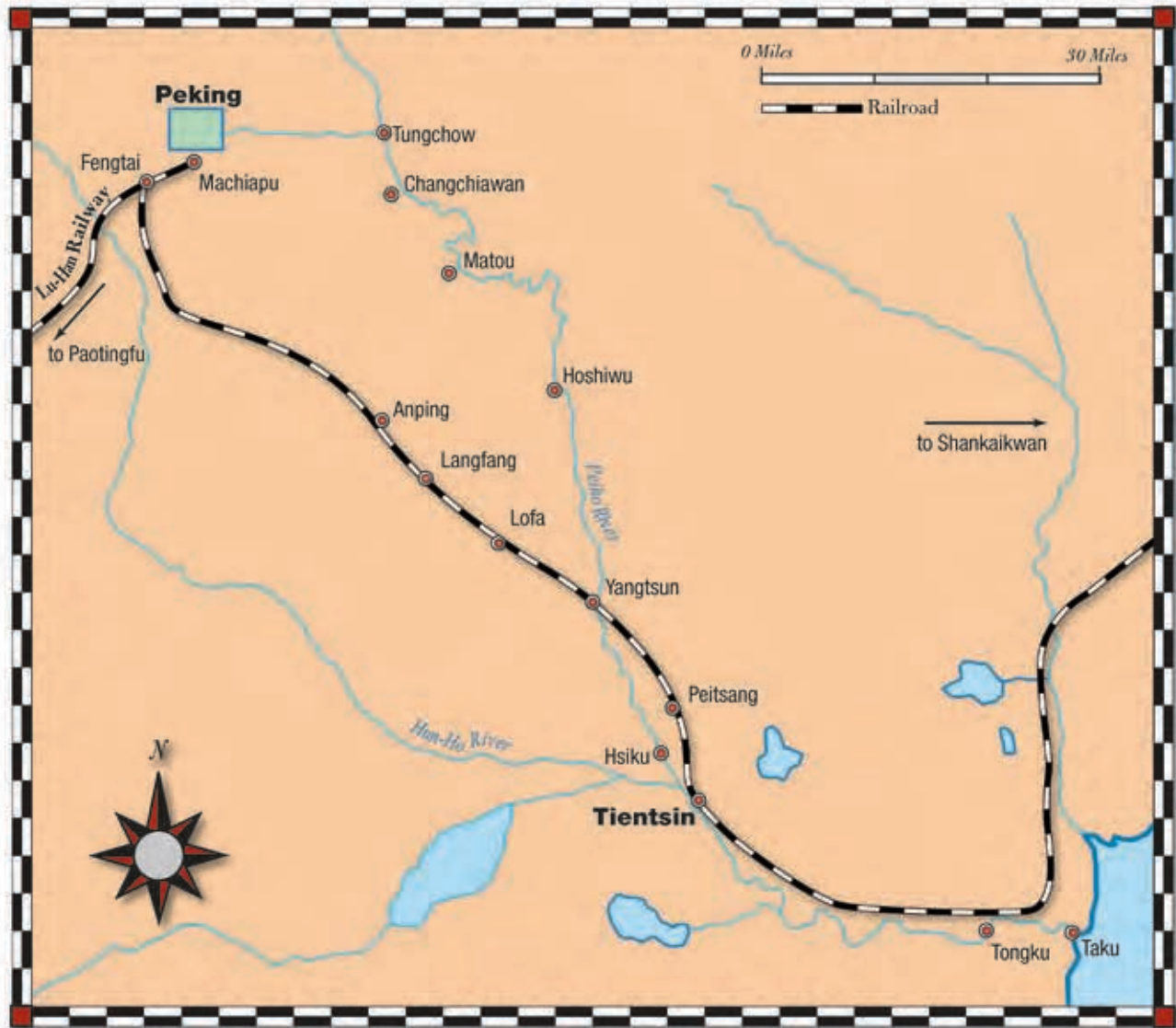
The Army acquired the Danish .30 caliber Krag-Jorgenson rifle in 1893, and American infantrymen soon enjoyed a reputation for expert marksmanship. It would make the difference in several engagements of the China campaign. Artillery training and expertise lagged behind, although Chaffee would be blessed with a gifted artillery officer. Cavalry units, though at a premium because of their limited numbers, were generally underused in China because of the difficulties associated with provisioning them.



The primary sources behind this essay include the official reports of the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine officers who participated in the China Relief Expedition. The War Department's Annual Report for 1900 contains extensive narratives of the summer's operations, as well as a number of useful maps. The National Archives in Washington, D.C., also holds a large collection of unpublished letters, journals, and various records concerning both the combat operations and the activities of the occupying powers in Tientsin and Peking. In addition to these primary sources, there is a rich collection of secondary sources describing the fate of the besieged legations and the relief expedition.

3 Alan C. Lowe, "Foreign Devils and Boxers: A Concise History of Combined Interoperability During the Boxer Rebellion in 1900," Master's Thesis (Fort Leavenworth, KS: The U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2000), p. 62.

Theater of Operations from Peking to Taku



May, 1900

"Now We Are Safe!"

Throughout the spring of 1900, the Boxer movement spread from its origins in Shantung Province to neighboring regions, including Chihli Province, home of the capital of Peking. Anti-foreign sentiment was particularly high there because the Europeans and Japanese had invested heavily in the area. The Boxers at first directed their violence toward the "rice Christians," who endured horrific slaughter as the "spirit-soldiers" became ever more emboldened.

The crisis grew into a full-scale uprising primarily because the Imperial Court of the Empress Dowager Tsu Hsi had become a battleground between the moderates and reformers on the one hand and the anti-foreign faction on the other. Li Hung-chang was China's foremost statesman and a man who had some understanding of the outside world. He and the newly appointed governor of Shantung, Yuan Shih-kai (who had replaced the anti-foreign Yu Hsien at the insistence of the foreign powers), counseled the Empress to proceed cautiously and to avoid any link to the Boxers. On the other side of the argument was Prince Tuan, a violently anti-foreign courtier who was closely allied to Tsu Hsi by marriage. His son, Pu Chun, had been designated to replace the recently purged Kwang Tsu in January. Like the Empress herself, Tuan believed that all of China's troubles emanated from foreign influence and presence. He had helped lead the purge of the reformers in 1898, suspecting that foreign governments were behind them. He regarded the Boxers as a potentially useful militia to rid the country of the enemy. For the time being, Tsu Hsi walked the middle line, vacillating in her attitude toward the Boxers.¹

Meanwhile, the foreign diplomats, their families, and staffs reclined in relative security within Peking. The Legation Quarter was situated inside the section of Peking known as Tartar City, between the Tartar Wall and the Imperial City, and it included the embassies of eleven nations. In peaceful times, this sector was popular with Manchu officials, who liked to shop for European goods there. As spring turned to summer, however, the mood was increasingly tense. Boxers arrived in the city, and it was clear that the Qing government was either helpless to restrain them or, worse, actively supporting them. When the foreign diplomats complained to the Tsungli Yamen (the Chinese foreign affairs office) about the unruly Boxers, the response was unpredictable—at times reassuring, at other times indifferent or hostile—reflecting the wavering feelings of the Empress herself toward the movement.

Besides the legations, the other major concentration of Europeans in the capital city was in the Peitang Cathedral, where French and Italian missionaries under the leadership of Bishop Favier looked over a flock of more than 3,000 Chinese converts. The cathedral itself was a fortified compound that in the months to come would be a bastion against anti-foreign violence.

Earlier in the spring, in response to the growing threat, Britain, the United States, and Italy sent warships to Taku, while the Germans sent a squadron to Kiaochow. By mid-April, despite the appearance of Boxer propaganda placards throughout Peking, the foreign ministers there were feeling a bit calmer, and the foreign naval presence off Chinese shores was reduced. But as reports came in of Boxers slaughtering whole villages of Chinese Christians near the capital, tensions resumed. In the last two weeks of May, diplomats and their families and staffs became apprehensive about what might happen if the Boxers turned violent. When the ministers

¹ Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China's War on Foreigners That Shook the World in the Summer of 1900* (New York: Berkley Books, 2000), pp. 33–39.

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complained to the Tsungli Yamen, they were shrugged off with vague assurances that the government was doing its best to contain the Boxers.

Finally, in the last few days of May, it became apparent to the diplomats within Peking that they were in mortal danger. Chinese servants and other employees were deserting their patrons, and droves of Chinese Christians were pouring into the city, telling tales of massacres. They reported that Boxers had torn up rail lines and burned the station at Fengtai. The foreign ministers met on 28 May and agreed that the time had come to call for reinforcements for the few legation guards provided by the Russians. The Chinese officials at the Tsungli Yamen insisted that no foreign troops were to be permitted in the city. Sir Claude MacDonald responded angrily that troops were indeed coming, and that if they were opposed, many more would come. Eventually, the Chinese reluctantly agreed, and small contingents of foreign guards began moving toward Peking.

The last two days of May were anxious ones for the foreigners in Peking. Boxers and Imperial troops sympathetic to them were marching through the streets carrying placards denouncing all foreigners and inciting crowds to violence. Rumors spread throughout the city that Chinese troops were just outside the city and were prepared to contest any attempt by foreign troops to enter. While the ministers and their staffs fretted about plans to defend the legations, other foreign civilians in the city made arrangements to disguise themselves and flee, if necessary, to the homes of sympathetic Chinese friends.

Then, to the foreigners' great relief, a contingent of more than 350 guards arrived in the city. Marines from Britain and soldiers from Russia, France, Italy, and Japan marched into the legations. In addition, a small troop of fifty American Marines commanded by Captain John T. Meyers and Captain Newt H. Hall also arrived, much to the comfort of American Minister Edwin H. Conger, who exclaimed with joy, "Now we are safe!" He might have been less sanguine had he known that the troops had little more than their basic load of ammunition. Along with their rifles, the foreign troops could muster only a few heavier pieces and just one piece of artillery.²

About seventy miles downriver from Peking, the foreign concessions (land grants) at Tientsin were even more vulnerable. Six hundred foreigners and 4,000 Chinese Christians lived in the city, where they conducted trade and operated warehouses and factories. Their lifeline was the Peiho River, which ran some forty miles farther east to Taku. Boxers and Imperial troops had occupied the central fortified city, as well as some of the environs, and were threatening to attack the foreign concessions, which lay to the east and south.

By the end of May, the Empress Dowager was torn and almost wholly without options. There was little doubt that if she ordered the Boxers suppressed, they would turn on the government and might well rout what forces she could muster around the capital. If she failed to restrain them, then the foreigners would almost certainly use the Boxers' activities as an excuse for further depredations. The time to act decisively against the Boxers had passed, and the Imperial Court was as much at the Boxers' mercy as were the foreign legations.

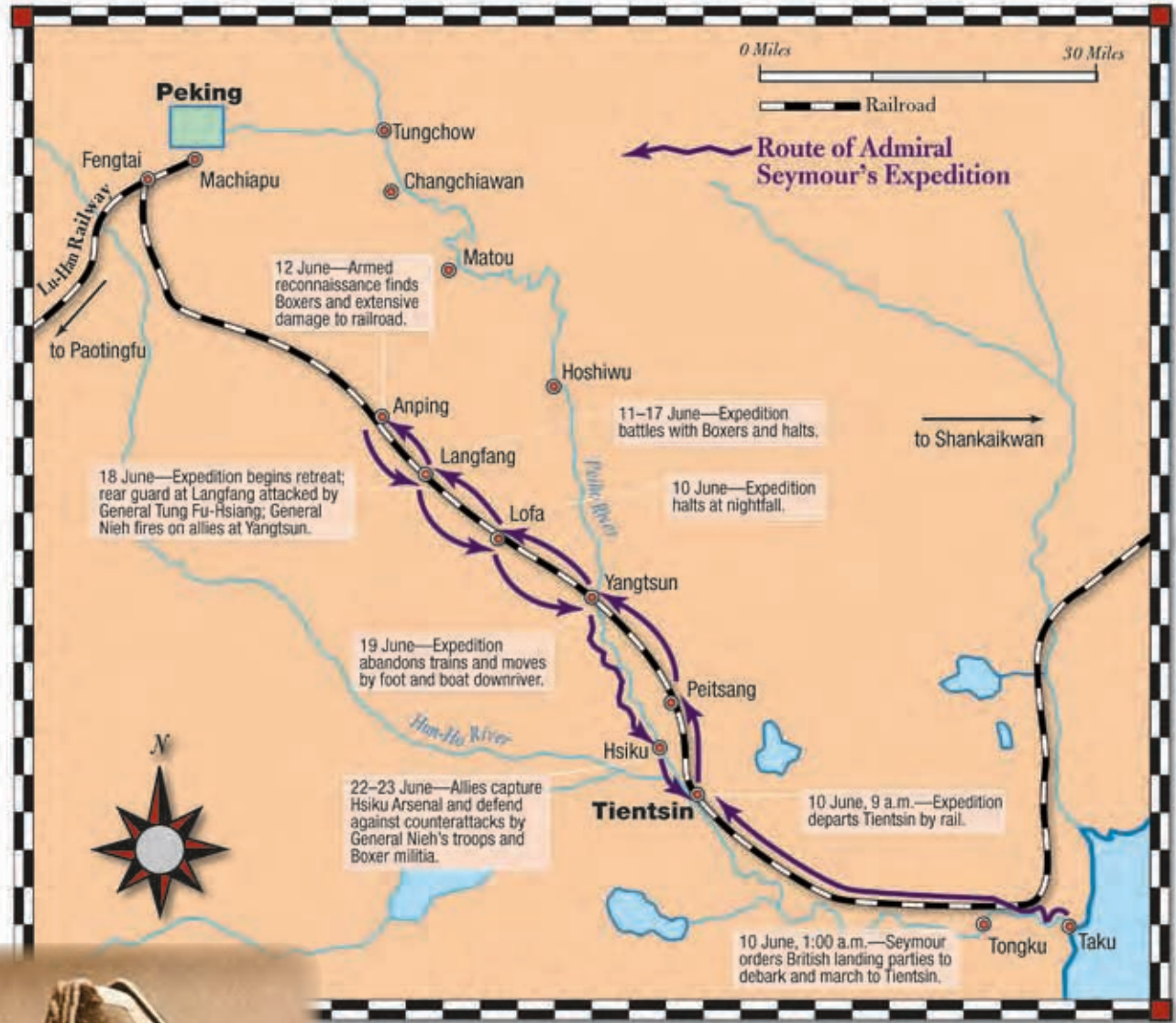
² "The Marine Corps in Tientsin and Peking," Report of the Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., 29 September 1900; from the Naval Historical Center (NHC) web site, <http://www.history.navy.mil/docs/boxer/boxer2.htm> (accessed 23 May 2007).



“Strike toward Heaven, and its gates will be opened.”
“Strike Earth, and its gates will give way.”

A Boxer recruit.

Seymour's Expedition



10-23 June 1900



June

"Sha! Sha!"

("Kill! Kill!")

Seymour's Expedition

By the end of May 1900, the situation in Peking was desperate enough to convince even the most phlegmatic that, without reinforcements, the diplomatic legations would eventually be attacked. Boxers and their Imperial allies were roaming the streets, inciting mobs to riot against anything foreign, including Chinese Christian converts. Two British missionaries had been murdered on 1 June in Yung-ch'ing-hsien. Reports came in that Anping station had been destroyed and that the rail between Tientsin and Peking had been torn up. Most ominously, Tung Fu-hsiang's Kansu Muslim troops, who had been expelled previously from the vicinity of the capital at the insistence of the foreigners, had moved back into the city and its environs. So it was that on 9 June, Sir Claude MacDonald, the British minister in Peking, sent a desperate telegram to his countryman Vice Admiral Sir Edward Seymour stationed off Taku, urging that a relief column be sent immediately. That same day, the telegraph line between Peking and Tientsin was cut.

Seymour reacted hastily and organized a column of British sailors and marines to march to Tientsin. Once there, he formed a relief force consisting of 916 British officers, seamen, and marines as well as 540 Germans, 312 Russians, 158 French, 112 Americans, 54 Japanese, 40 Italian, and 25 Austrians for a total of 2,157 troops. U.S. Navy Captain B. H. McCalla served as Seymour's second in command and was familiar with the route to Peking, having previously escorted U.S. Marine guards there at the end of May. The troops assembled at the rail station in Tientsin, and Seymour organized a convoy of five armed trains to carry the soldiers, some guns, supplies for repairing the rail line, and three days' rations. His intent was to travel the entire distance to Peking by rail and reach the city by nightfall. The expedition departed at just after 9:00 a.m.

Seymour's responsiveness to the call for help from Peking was noteworthy, and his energy in organizing and dispatching a relief column in twenty-four hours was nothing short of remarkable. But the admiral's plan was to founder on two main points. First, he failed to account for the fact that the railroad between Tientsin and Peking had already been seriously damaged by the Boxers. Various accounts indicate that officers in Tientsin had received word concerning the wrecked rail line, so it is hard to imagine that Seymour didn't know what he was about to face. Even if the convoy had met no opposition, it would have taken more than a day to repair the rail lines above Yangtsun. Second, having failed to account for this inevitable delay, Seymour made the more serious error of underestimating the logistics necessary to complete his task: with barely three days' rations, his expedition had little chance of reaching Peking without a plan to resupply the force en route. In any event, this would be a difficult task, because although the armed trains could easily scatter the Boxer mobs, once the trains passed on, the Boxers would return. If Seymour had coupled his energy and determination with a bit of practical circumspection, his expedition might have succeeded.

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The Empress Dowager's government learned of Seymour's departure and reacted with anger that the foreigners would dare send such a large troop contingent without permission. That same day, Prince Tuan replaced Prince Ching as president of the Tsungli Yamen. All along the line from Tientsin to Peking, Imperial troops were alerted, and the unruly Boxers went in search of vulnerable targets.

On the first day of the relief attempt, the armed trains traveled about twenty-five miles to Yangtsun, where General Nieh's 4,000-strong detachment of Imperial troops was camped. Unsure how to reconcile conflicting orders coming from Peking, Nieh allowed Seymour's trains to pass. The expedition went a few more miles and found the tracks heavily damaged. They spent the rest of the day repairing the line and moved out again the next morning. By sunset on 11 June, they had advanced all the way to Langfang, just forty miles from Peking, where they found Boxer militia destroying the rail lines. The Boxers attacked but were easily scattered, and Seymour's laborers commenced to repair the damage done the next day, 12 June. Simultaneously, the admiral dispatched a reconnaissance party to assess the situation ahead. Ten miles farther on, near Anping, they found strong Boxer resistance and more destruction.

The expedition began to feel the logistical pinch. With rations running low and a determined, if ill-trained and ill-equipped, foe still between him and Peking, Seymour decided to send a train back to Tientsin for provisions while the rest of the expedition remained at Langfang, repairing rails and fighting off Boxer attacks. When the train reached Yangtsun, however, the officers found the remaining rail line between there and Tientsin destroyed and strong Boxer resistance throughout the surrounding countryside. With no chance of reaching Tientsin, the train returned to Langfang on 15 June. Seymour's expedition was surrounded and cut off from its base. When several Italian troops fell prey to a Boxer mob, they were cut to pieces.¹

Admiral Seymour and his officers convened a council of war to decide what to do. To continue on to Peking seemed out of the question as they had few rations and little water and faced the possibility of having to fight not only the Boxers but the Chinese Imperial forces as well. Instead, the council decided on a slow, fighting withdrawal back to Tientsin, using the trains as long as they could. On 18 June, as the column retreated slowly, German scouts reported that both Boxers and Imperial troops were opposing them near Yangtsun. This force turned out to include General Nieh's Imperial forces, indicating that the depleted allied force might well be facing a major battle, with the enemy astride their only line of communications to Tientsin. To make matters worse, the German soldiers assigned to guard Langfang had been attacked by the Kansu Muslim troops under the command of the feared General Tung Fu-hsiang—proof that the government's forces were actively cooperating with the Boxers.

On 19 June, the expedition stopped just short of Yangtsun, where they saw that the enemy had so damaged the bridge over the Peiho River that the trains could not cross safely. They set out on foot, planning to follow the river downstream to Tientsin. Boxers swarmed over the abandoned trains and later burned them. As Seymour's troops plodded south, they commandeered several boats to carry the wounded, the artillery, and supplies. But with the river running low from a lack of rain, the boats repeatedly grounded until the officers finally decided to throw the guns overboard. Low on ammunition and rations, encumbered by the wounded, and without the means to communicate with their allies, they struggled on as their hopes of rescue dwindled.

1 Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China's War on Foreigners That Shook the World in the Summer of 1900* (New York: Berkley Books, 2000), p. 95.

The expedition fought its largest battle over the village of Peitsang, taking it on 21 June. But the cost was more killed and wounded. The latter became both a moral and physical burden for Admiral Seymour, who was determined to deliver the injured to safety. With all of his officers worried that a complete disaster might soon occur, Seymour elected to move out that night to try to escape the tightening noose of Imperial troops and Boxer mobs.

On 22 June, a measure of good fortune finally smiled upon the troubled expedition when they found a building that had a small guard within, whom they quickly routed. The building turned out to be the Hsiku Arsenal—a Chinese supply point stocked with water, food, ammunition, and arms. Admiral Seymour wisely decided to hole up in the arsenal until help could come. The Chinese attempted to counterattack, but the allies beat them back with relative ease. They were not yet behind friendly lines, but at least Seymour's ill-fated expedition was temporarily safe in a position they could defend. Unable to go any farther because of exhaustion, lack of supplies, and casualties, they hunkered down and hoped for a rescue.

Seymour's expedition was a serious failure, the more so because with the forces in hand, the admiral might have accomplished much more to bring relief to Peking. Although his energy and responsiveness in launching the expedition were admirable, they were equally misdirected. What was needed was not a single body of troops to add to the guards in the capital but rather a reliable line of communications with the coast. Seymour's efforts would have been more effective had he methodically secured the rail line and stations between Tientsin and Peking. By stationing troops and supplies at Yangtsun, Langfang, and Anping, and then supplementing this effort with railed patrols by armored cars, he could have helped build a line of communications along which supplies and troops could eventually reach Peking. Alternately, we can consider what the allies might have accomplished with Seymour's troops if they had used them to take the walled city of Tientsin in June. As it happened, the city remained a serious obstacle for the relief expedition to Peking until mid-July. Had the allies taken the city early, the relief column might well have reached Peking a month or so earlier than they actually did. Instead, Seymour's expedition became a large, moving target for the Boxers and Imperial troops. The would-be rescuers now required rescue themselves.

The Battle of Tientsin, Phase 1

The security of the diplomatic legations in Peking, as well as the viability of the foreigners' presence in northern China, depended on a secure base in Tientsin (modern-day Tianjin). An ancient trading city, it was the link by rail and water from the coast to the capital city. Following the Second Opium War and the Treaty of Tientsin, the foreign imperialist powers maintained sizable concessions—each its own microcosm with schools, hospitals, and barracks—to the southeast of the walled city. Their presence remained a touchstone of dissatisfaction and, not infrequently, violence among the non-Christian Chinese. In the summer of 1870, following rumors that French nuns were kidnapping Chinese children and using their eyes to produce medicines, an enraged mob burned down the Wanghailou Church. When the Western powers protested the violence, the Qing government was forced to pay reparations. In June 1900, the city was once again gripped by anger and violence. While the Imperial forces remained noncommittal, Boxers ran amok throughout the city.

The departure of the Seymour expedition aggravated the already tense situation in Tientsin and throughout northern China. On 11 June, the head of the Japanese Legation in Peking, Sugiyama Akira, made the mistake of traveling to the rail station unarmed. General Tung Fu-hsiang's Kansu troops intercepted him, dragged him from his cart, and disemboweled him.

Meanwhile, Boxers burned the stations at Lofa and Langfang. Seymour's trains had hardly left Tientsin when the inflamed mobs began to put increasing pressure on the few allied troops that remained behind to defend the concessions.

Two days later, on 13 June, a major Boxer uprising started in Peking. German soldiers atop the Tartar Wall had sniped at the Boxer gatherings below, killing ten. When the enraged crowd gathered at the Ha-Ta-men Gate adjoining the eastern boundary of the legations, a squad of American Marines seized the gatehouse to keep them from entering. Wildly gesticulating mobs of young men garbed with red sashes attacked the legations and were driven off. Frustrated in their attempts to get at the foreigners, the Boxers unleashed their wrath on the Chinese Christian population, slaughtering them with abandon. On 16 June, they rampaged through the southern quarter of Peking known as Chinese City, burning any stores housing foreign goods. The fires raged out of control and damaged the Chienmen Gate, and all remaining foreigners and native Christians in the city fled to the relative protection of the legations or the Pei-tang Cathedral.

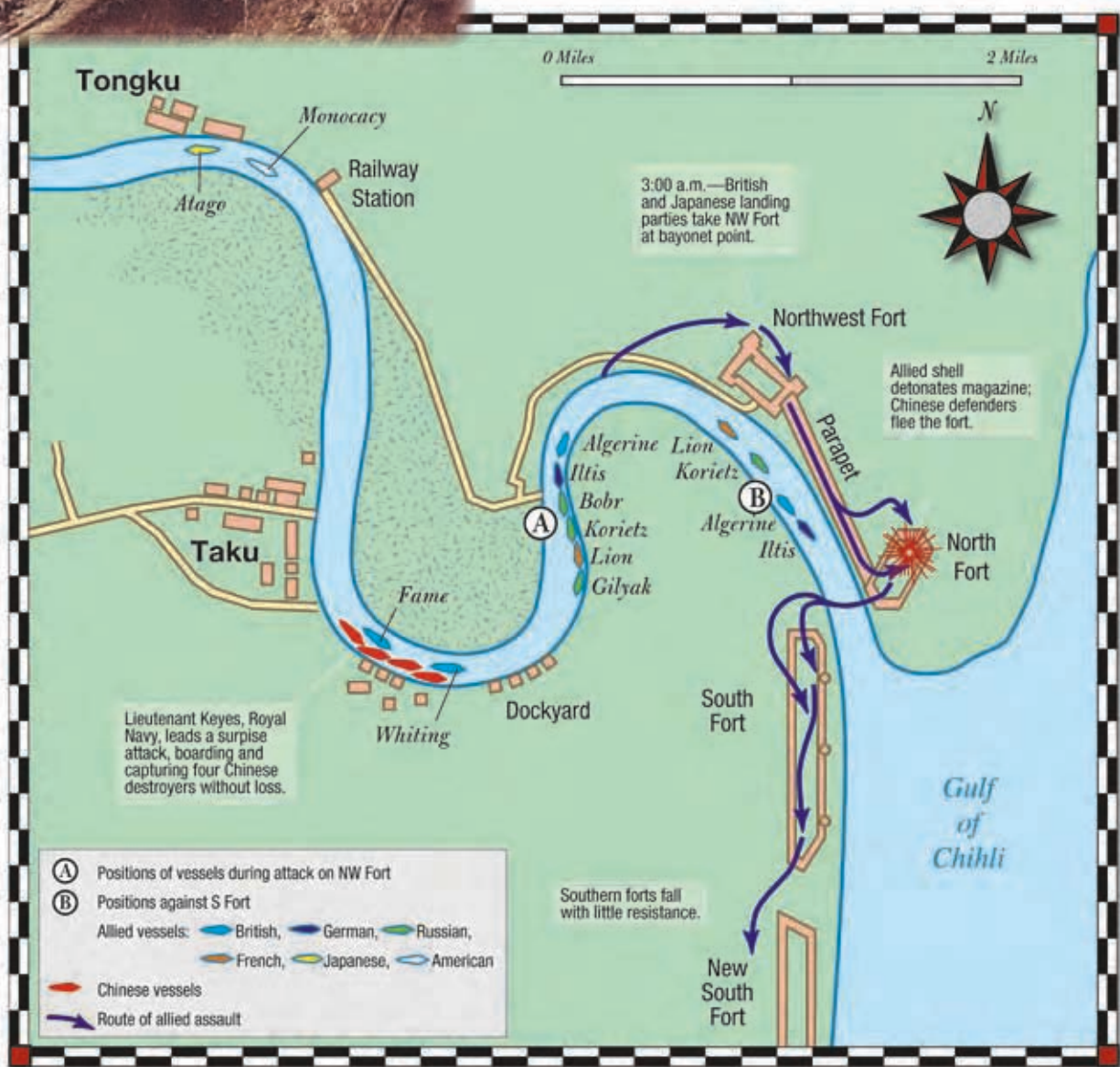
In Tientsin, where some 2,000 allied guards tried to defend both the concessions and the all-important rail station, the Boxers grew ever more bold. On 13 June, they attacked the critically important eastern railway station, but newly arrived Russian reinforcements beat back the assault. The next day, Boxers mobbed a French cathedral and were stopped from destroying it only when a Chinese Imperial gunboat fired on them. The beleaguered allies in the concessions were gratified at this unexpected show of force, but developments all around them made it clear that, whatever the orders or motivation of the gunboat crew, other Imperial troops were either letting the Boxers run wild or actively supporting them. Fortunately, a fresh contingent of 1,700 Russian troops arrived in the city, but as events would soon show, this latest detachment was barely enough to protect the foreigners in Tientsin from a massacre.

On 15 June, the Boxers rampaged through the Chinese City portion of Tientsin, killing the Chinese Christians there and setting fire to shops, churches, and anything that smacked of foreign presence. The following day, they finally turned their attention to the foreign concessions themselves. Advancing with little weaponry but great fanaticism, the red-clad mob fell upon whatever undefended houses and buildings they could find, burning them to the ground. The allies responded where they could with rifle volleys, but the Boxers continued the violence despite suffering high casualties.

Word of the desperate situation in Tientsin reached the foreign naval squadrons anchored off Taku on 16 June. With the Imperial troops around Taku clearly taking steps to close off river access to Tientsin, the commanders of the various foreign navies (less the Americans, whose commander, Admiral Louis Kempff, lacked a clear mandate from Washington to participate) met and decided to issue an ultimatum to the local Chinese commanders: surrender the Taku forts by 2:00 a.m. the following morning or face a general assault.

The Chinese, emboldened perhaps by the failure of Seymour's expedition and reflecting the outrage of the Imperial Court, responded an hour before the deadline by shelling the enemy ships. The ensuing action was in the grandest tradition of nineteenth century naval combat. Nine allied ships returned fire in the darkness, and two British destroyers moved upriver and managed to capture four of their Chinese counterparts without losing a single man. British and Japanese troops then stormed the northwest fort. The Chinese defenders put up only a half-hearted attempt to resist them before fleeing.

The Battle of the Taku Forts



17 June 1900
2:00-8:00 a.m.

The second fort on the north shore was all but destroyed when a lucky shot from a ship exploded its magazine. The southern forts surrendered soon thereafter. By 8:00 a.m., the Battle of the Taku forts was over, and the allies had undisputed control of the mouth of the river leading to Tientsin.

The assault on the Taku forts enraged the Empress Dowager. That same day, she received what was probably a forged document purporting to list allied demands, including the restoration of Kwang Hsu to the throne. With uncharacteristic ire, she issued an Imperial edict directing the provincial governors to mobilize troops for war and ordered the foreigners' ministers in Peking to leave the city by the next day. After some discussion, the allied leaders in the city decided that they would not leave—at least not yet—and not until the Chinese government made clear the security arrangements for the evacuation. An uneasy standoff in the capital ensued. On 20 June, German minister Baron von Ketteler was killed by an Imperial officer while en route to the Tsungli Yamen. The other foreign officials declared their intention to remain in the city until their own troops arrived from Tientsin. In response, the Empress declared war, and the siege of the legations in Peking officially began.

In Tientsin, the Chinese reacted to the taking of the Taku forts by shelling the foreign concessions from the walled city and the West Arsenal. The Boxers launched a major attack that all but destroyed the French quarter. They mounted a serious assault on the rail station, but the allies—chiefly the Russians—managed to hold, suffering about 100 casualties in the battle. The pressure on the allied holdings in the city continued to mount as the number of Boxers and Imperial troops swelled. On 18 June, the same day that Seymour's expedition retreated to Yangtsun, a hastily organized force of 175 Austrian, British, German, and Italian troops sortied against the Military College across the river from the British concessions. They captured eight guns, destroyed the college, and killed the defenders, providing a bit of relief to the concessions. The situation remained desperate, however, and messengers were being sent to Taku requesting immediate help.

The Americans got off to a slow start in supplying significant forces to the relief expedition. They had less of a presence in China to defend, and they were distracted by the growing conflict in the Philippines. The same day the Boxers were attacking the French church in Tientsin, the U.S. War Department cabled MacArthur in Manila, asking him how fast he could send troops to Taku. MacArthur replied,

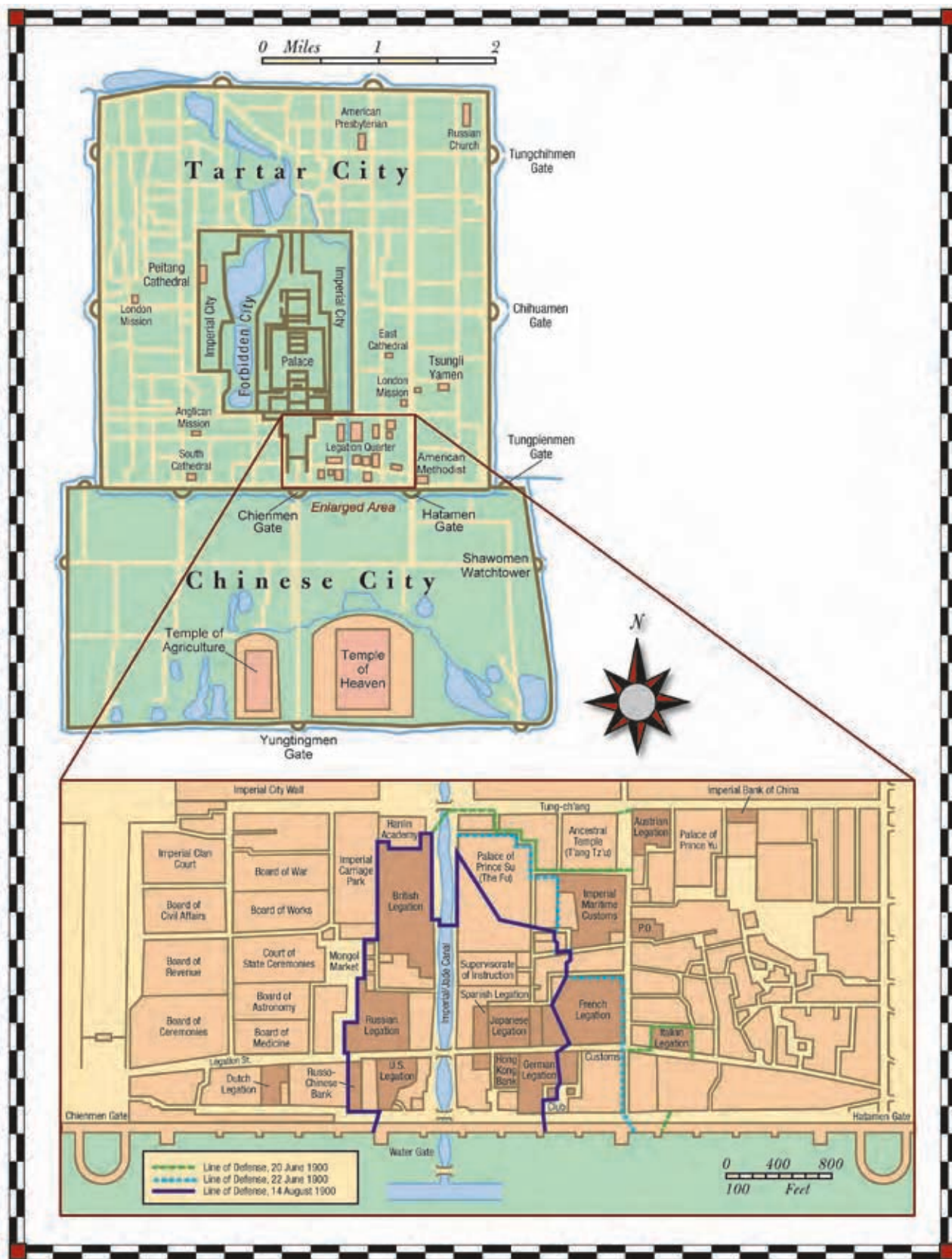
Force in Philippines has been disseminated to limitation of safety; concentration slow to avoid evacuation of territory now occupied, which would be extremely unfortunate. Have not cared to emphasize this feature of situation. Loss of a regiment at this time would be a serious matter, but if critical emergency arises in China can send a regiment two days' notice.²

On 18 June, Adjutant General Henry C. Corbin ordered MacArthur to send a regiment to Taku. The regimental commander was to confer with Admiral Kempff and “report to the American minister in Peking,” though how he was to accomplish the latter was not discussed.³

² General Arthur MacArthur to Adjutant General Henry C. Corbin, Washington, D.C., received 16 June 1900, in U.S. War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), Volume 1, Part 9 [Hereafter, *Annual Report*], p. 142.

³ Adjutant General Corbin to General MacArthur, 16 June 1900, *Annual Report*, p. 142.

Peking and the Diplomatic Legations



The regiment in question was to be the Ninth, commanded by Colonel Emerson H. Liscum. A typhoon delayed departure for China until 27 June, but fortunately for the Americans and their allies in Tientsin, the U.S. Marines moved faster. On 14 June, six officers and 101 enlisted Marines were dispatched to China from the First Regiment at the Cavite naval station in the Philippines. They arrived off Taku on 18 June, where they joined a small contingent of two officers and thirty men. Major Littleton W. T. Waller commanded the Marines initially, and among his subordinates were First Lieutenants Smedley Butler and Henry Leonard. The account of how Waller and his officers led the small Marine detachment over the ensuing nine days provides insight into the difficulties and challenges of working within an ad hoc coalition.

Waller came under the command of Rear Admiral Kempff, second in command of the Asiatic Station and the ranking naval officer at Taku. His original orders were to cooperate with allied powers in the advance against Tientsin. Armed with 3-inch field pieces and a Colt automatic gun, the Marines disembarked at Taku and advanced to Tongku on the morning of 20 June. They repaired the road and rail as they marched to a point about eight miles from Tientsin. There, Waller's force met and joined a detachment of 400 Russians. Waller and the commander agreed that they would hold their position in anticipation of reinforcements the next day. At 2:00 a.m. the next morning, however, the Russian officer notified Waller that he intended to march for Tientsin immediately, despite the Chinese defenders who were blocking the road. Waller objected but acquiesced to join the attack.⁴

The advance began inauspiciously as the Marines discovered that their 3-inch guns were unserviceable and dumped them in a canal. The allied column moved westward along the rail line toward Tientsin, with the Marines' Colt 6-millimeter gun in the van, under the command of First Lieutenant W. G. Powell, followed by the Russian main body and the rest of the Marines bringing up the rear. At about 7:00 a.m., the column ran into some 2,000 Chinese defenders—both Boxers and Imperial troops—who had taken up defensive positions near the East Arsenal. The marine sharpshooters had some success in silencing the enemy rifles near the arsenal, but when other Chinese forces opened fire from the west, the advancing allied troops went to ground. After enduring frontal and flanking fire for some time, the Russians began to fall back, and Major Waller's Marines followed as a covering force. They conducted a fighting withdrawal under heavy pressure for four hours before reaching safety. Waller's official report implies that the Russians' retreat under fire was not coordinated beforehand and left his Marines in the lurch. After reorganizing briefly, the combined forces marched rearward another four miles and stopped for the day. Waller's men had marched thirty miles and fought for five hours straight. The cost of the day's action was four killed and nine wounded, and the Colt gun was lost after jamming.

Subsequent events and the eventual success of the China Relief Expedition serve to obscure the sense of dread that American forces operated under in June and July. Major Waller was deeply affected by his abortive attempt to relieve Tientsin. His official report of the action on 21 June concluded:

The condition at Tientsin is almost hopeless. If we can not attack tomorrow, I fear the worst. An American escaped from Tientsin informs me that there were 2 killed and 4 wounded among the Americans before he left—six days ago...Confidentially, I believe there can be no hope for Captain McCalla's party [a reference to Seymour's expedition].⁴

⁴ Report of Major Littleton W. T. Waller, Chin Liang Cheng, 22 June 1900; from the NHC web site, <http://www.history.navy.mil/docs/boxer/boxer3.htm> (accessed 28 May 2007).

That evening, English and Russian reinforcements arrived along with smaller German, American, Italian, and Japanese detachments, and Waller decided to cooperate with Commander Christopher Craddock of the Royal Navy. The combined force now numbered about 2,000, half of which were Russian. Waller sent a small party of Marines forward with a British troop to conduct reconnaissance. The following morning, 22 June, the allied force advanced again toward the outskirts of Tientsin. That night, the commanders of the national contingents held a war council and decided to attack the following morning south of and parallel to the rail line in two columns: the Americans and British on the left, and the Germans and Russians on the right. The forces commenced their march at 4:00 a.m. and by 7:00 a.m. had made contact with the Chinese. The allies advanced steadily throughout the morning but failed to decisively engage and destroy the defenders. At about 12:30 p.m., they pushed their way into the Tientsin concessions and relieved the harried Europeans, Americans, and Japanese. The Marine losses in the attack numbered one killed and three wounded.

On the evening of their victorious advance, the British Consulate in Tientsin received a strange visitor. An exhausted and bedraggled Chinese man named Chao Yin-ho was escorted in. He had come from the Hsiku Arsenal, where Admiral Seymour and his depleted force were surrounded by General Nieh's troops and their Boxer allies. Chao was the devoted servant of Clive Bigham, an English linguist who served as Seymour's translator. Early on the morning of 24 June, he had left the arsenal, swum the Peiho River, and made his way into Tientsin. He was intercepted, handled roughly, questioned by the Boxers, and later fired upon by the French, but he persisted and finally made it to safety. Chao conveyed the urgency of Seymour's situation, and the allies reacted quickly.

Colonel Sherinsky with 900 Russian troops joined 500 British sailors under the command of Royal Navy Commanders David Beatty and Christopher Craddock, and together with a small German contingent, they maneuvered north toward the arsenal. Chao Yin-ho guided them, and by midmorning on 25 June, they reached their countrymen in the arsenal. A much-relieved Seymour and his rescuers evacuated the wounded, and the combined force then moved out the following day, taking a circuitous route back into the Tientsin concessions. Seymour's expedition had been rescued after a harrowing seventeen days. Casualties amounted to 62 dead and 228 wounded.

American Marines under Major Waller apparently accompanied Colonel Sherinsky's force, as Waller's official report contains some detail of the operation. Throughout the operations near Tientsin, the Marines were praised for their marksmanship, energy, and capacity for independent small-unit actions. The Americans who accompanied the abortive expedition to Peking were equally regarded. Admiral Seymour heaped praise upon U.S. Navy Captain Bowman McCalla in a letter to Admiral Kempff:

I can not conclude my letter without expressing to you, sir, the high admiration I have for Capt. B.H. McCalla, who accompanied us in command of your officers and men. Their post was usually in the advanced guard, where their zeal and go was praised by all. I regret to state that Captain McCalla was wounded in three places, but considering the gallant way in which he exposed himself I am only equally surprised and thankful that he is alive.⁵

5 Report of the Secretary of the Navy, Washington, D.C., 17 November 1900; from the NHC web site, <http://www.history.navy.mil/docs/boxer/boxer1.htm#secnav>.

On 27 June, the Russians, commanded by Major General Anatoli Stessel, spearheaded an attack on the East Arsenal, and the British cooperated, along with a small detachment of Waller's Marines under the command of Lieutenant Wade L. Jolly. The combined force numbered about 1,800 troops and six guns. Waller figured the enemy strength in and around the arsenal to be about 7,000, which was probably an overestimation. The attack flushed the enemy combatants from their trenches with few allied casualties and one American wounded. Once again, U.S. Marines were in the van and some of the first to surmount the enemy parapets. Lieutenant Jolly was overcome by the heat, "but not," as Major Waller states, "until he had brought his men back to their quarters." Lieutenant Harding captured a flag from the enemy and presented it to the major. Waller complained in his official report about the unsuitability of the Marines' uniforms—"the blue shirts make a splendid target"—and grumbled that his force was "disgracefully small," given the job they had to do. He entertained little hope of reaching Peking in time.⁶

Within the walls of the capital, the civilians and their guards were hunkered down, making the best of a bad situation. The siege, which began on 20 June, was taking its toll. The Austrian mission, afraid that they were too exposed (they were), abandoned their holdings, forcing the remaining defenders in the Customs Office to fall back also in order to maintain the integrity of the defense. The Chinese moved into the facility and burned it to the ground. On 22 June, a panicked rumor resulted in several of the foreign troop detachments abandoning their posts and rushing into the British Legation. Sir Claude MacDonald reacted by relieving the ranking Austrian commander, Captain von Thomann, who was responsible for the fiasco, and assuming overall command of the legations. He ordered the troops to return to their positions, but by then the Chinese had taken and burned the Italian Legation.

With the lines of his defenses shrinking, MacDonald became concerned about the legations' chief vulnerability: the towering Tartar Wall that bordered the Legation Quarter to the south. If Chinese forces occupied the wall, the entire quarter would be subjected to direct bombardment. Over the course of several days, the American Marines and German soldiers undertook an operation to secure the wall—the Americans clearing and fortifying the western portion, and the Germans, the eastern. Enemy forces likewise constructed barricades to contain the foreigners, and the standoff at the top of the Tartar Wall became one of the most intense of the siege.

Soon after the siege began, the allies erected barricades along every conceivable entrance to their compound. Ably covered by rifle fire, the defenses frustrated any attempt to attack the legations by conventional means. The Imperial troops had at least two 3-inch Krupp guns, and they managed to conduct a desultory bombardment on the Legation Quarter, but it was without much effect at first.⁷ The Chinese also tried to burn the defenders out, and on 23 June, they fired the renowned Hanlin Academy, which adjoined the British Legation. The defenders braved Chinese marksmen and tried to quell the flames, but most of the once-prestigious university was destroyed, along with its large and ancient library. The Chinese continued in their efforts to start fires, but the legations survived each attempt.

6 Report of Major Littleton W. T. Waller, Tientsin, 28 June 1900; from the NHC web site, <http://www.history.navy.mil/docs/boxer/boxer4.htm>.

7 Report of Sir Claude MacDonald, Peking, 21 July 1900; from the NHC web site, <http://www.history.navy.mil/docs/boxer/boxer10.htm>.

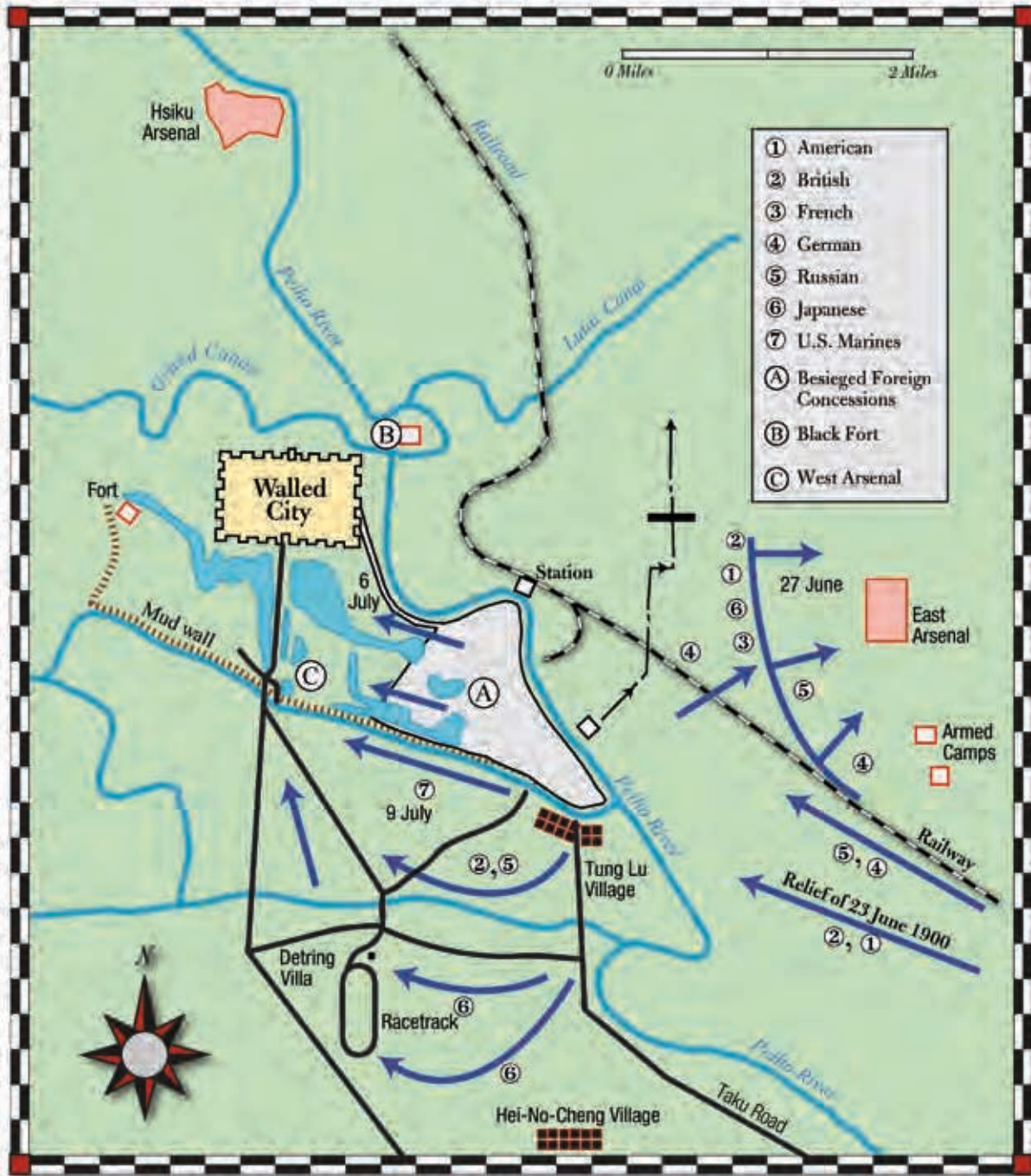
By the end of June, with no means of contacting the outside world, the besieged allies in Peking waited and hoped. Admiral Seymour's failure to arrive or send word was galling, and the ministers likewise had no knowledge of the situation in Tientsin. They were aware of the taking of the Taku forts but did not know what had prompted the dramatic attack. Constantly under fire and receiving no official word from the Imperial Court, they could only fear the worst and hope for the best.



A member of the Royal Marine Light Infantry firing through a loophole during the siege of the foreign legations.

八國聯軍

Preliminary Operations at Tientsin



23 June-9 July 1900

July

"Situation Extremely Grave"

The Siege of the Legations

By the beginning of July 1900, the foreigners trapped in Peking had been under siege for a week and a half. There had been a brief cease-fire on 25 June, but it lasted less than twenty-four hours, and the weary soldiers and civilians inside the legations remained determined to hold on until help could arrive. In place of the much-expected Admiral Seymour, five Imperial armies converged on Peking. The Empress had declared that her court regarded the Boxers as a patriotic militia that would henceforth work together with her troops. Under the direction of Imperial officers, the assault on the legations intensified, but the attacks continued to unfold in a seemingly random and desultory fashion. Thirty-eight legation guards had been killed in action, and another fifty-five were wounded. Sickness—principally dysentery and smallpox—remained a constant companion of the tightly packed foreign community and their Chinese Christian wards.

The month of July began with a serious setback. On 1 July, Chinese soldiers crept up the ramp leading to the eastern stretch of the Tartar Wall—the part held by the German soldiers—and surprised the defenders. The Germans scurried away, abandoning their critically important defenses, and the Chinese troops occupied the newly won position immediately. At a stroke, the entire foreign presence on the Tartar Wall was at risk. Had the Chinese exploited their success, disaster might have ensued, but the standoff atop the wall settled down, and the apprehensive defenders continued to hold the American sector opposite the Chinese.

Facing the American defenses, the Chinese barricades atop the wall were particularly threatening. Working carefully but steadily, the Chinese soldiers advanced against the defenders' flank, building a covering wall as they went. Once within striking distance of the American position, they started building a small fort from which they could hold the entire position at risk. If the foreigners had any hopes of retaining their defenses on the Tartar Wall, something would have to be done to remove the threat. The American Marines were about to show what they were made of.

At 3:00 a.m. on 3 July, U.S. Marine Captain Jack Myers assembled an assault team composed of Americans, British, and Russians. He then led them across the American barricade, and together they charged the Chinese defenses, routing them and killing sixty defenders at the cost of three allied killed and six wounded. This action secured the American position and, by extension, the entire legation compound, and it remained one of the most celebrated exploits of the siege. Myers' accomplishment boosted morale throughout the legations and restored the viability of the defenses atop the Tartar Wall. He was, however, wounded in the thigh and remained out of action for the duration of the siege.

The attack of 3 July was a high point for the Marines in Peking, but their behavior throughout the siege elicited some criticism. It was generally reported that under the stress of the siege along the Tartar Wall, the Marines resorted to drinking. Their gruff manner and proclivity for cursing their superiors offended certain foreign officials. Added to this, the traditional rivalry between the American Army and Marines was exacerbated by the tension of the precarious situation. With Jack Myers out of the picture, Captain Newt Hall took command of the Marines, and his relations with Minister Edwin Conger and other American officials remained testy.

Sir Claude MacDonald was obliged to work through the other ministers and their military officers to get anything done. Though nominally in command, his orders were regarded as suggestions to be obeyed or ignored, depending on how they related to the self-interest of the receiver. Still, he and his colleagues achieved an effective degree of cooperation, shuffling their few troops around to fend off assaults and rebuild defenses. When faced with the prospect of an indiscriminate massacre should the Chinese break through, nations that otherwise would have been at each other's throats found a common cause instead. The good will would not last long beyond the crisis, however. A mere four years later, the Japanese and Russians would clash on land and sea in a war that inaugurated the former as a great power and relegated the latter to the status of a sickened giant. In the summer of 1914, the powers that held together throughout the Peking siege marched to war against each other in a conflagration that would change the course of world history at a cost of more than eight million soldiers killed. But in that summer of 1900, isolated from the rest of the world and confined to a stinking compound surrounded by vicious enemies, the foreigners managed to act in concert.

The ad hoc nature of the international cooperation in Peking was perhaps best illustrated when the foreigners were delighted to find an old rusty artillery piece:

On the afternoon of 7 July some Chinese Christians who were digging a trench came upon an old Anglo-French rifled cannon barrel dating from the 1860 expedition. The gun was removed and cleaned up by a couple of American Marines. By the next day it had been lashed onto a gun carriage supplied by the Italians. The Russian [9-pounder] shells were fished out of the well, dried off, and found to fit quite well into the cannon...The cannon received many nicknames...but it seemed that "The International Gun" best suited it. After all, it was an Anglo-French barrel on an Italian carriage firing Russian shells and was manned by two American gunners.¹

The almost total lack of news concerning events outside Peking caused great frustration among the surrounded foreigners. What had happened to Admiral Seymour? Although they knew about the fall of the Taku forts, they did not know what ensued or about the staunch Chinese defense of Tientsin. The allies there were equally ignorant about developments in Peking. Most feared the worst—that the soldiers and civilians in Peking had already been massacred. But on 11 July, the U.S. State Department managed to send a cipher through the Chinese minister in Washington, D.C., Wu Ting-fang, to American Minister Conger in Peking. The reply came through the same channels on 20 July: "For one month we have been besieged in British legation under continued shot and shell from Chinese troops. Quick relief only can prevent general massacre."²

This communiqué was the first received by any Western power since mid-June, and when the Americans forwarded it to their European allies, most assumed that it was probably a forgery. But even if it were genuine, it was probably too late to rescue the legations. On the following day, however, a Chinese boy who had escaped from Peking with a message from Sir Claude arrived at Tientsin, confirming that at least as late as the first week of July, the foreigners in Peking were still alive. These two glimmers of hope galvanized the allied commanders in

1 Lynn E. Bodin and Chris Warner, *The Boxer Rebellion* (London: Elite, 1982), p. 24.

2 Elihu Root, Extract from Report of the Secretary of War, Washington, D.C., 30 November 1900, *Annual Report*, p. 11.

Tientsin. Whereas they had been operating under the assumption that their mission to the capital city would be a punitive expedition, they now believed that rescue was still possible.

Back in Peking, the pressure was mounting and relentless. On 13 July, the Chinese bombarded the Fu—previously the Palace of Prince Su—where some 2,000 Chinese Christians and their Japanese defenders under the redoubtable Colonel Shiba daily bore the brunt of the assaults. Fires and collapsing buildings seemed to herald the end, but Shiba's men persevered. A simultaneous assault on the German sector nearly overran the defenses, but Russian reinforcements stabilized the situation. Later that night, the Chinese detonated two mines under the French sector, killing several occupants and forcing the defenses to contract yet again. The threat of a general assault there was postponed because the explosions had killed many of the Chinese troops and Boxers who had gathered to watch.

In the days that followed, more dead and wounded kept piling up in the legations. At the same time, however, the Chinese and Sir Claude began sending messages back and forth. Prince Ching—the leader of the moderate faction and the foreigners' best hope for negotiation—urged the ministers and their families to leave Peking under the protection of the Chinese and, above all, to cease any further violence. But since the messenger delivering the offer was himself shot at by Boxer mobs, the foreigners had little confidence in the Chinese promises.

Nevertheless, when Sir Claude suggested through the messenger that a cease-fire would be in the interest of all, the Chinese agreed. On 17 July, the violence that had surrounded the legations for the past month ended. Conflicting signals continued to emanate from the Imperial Court, but the lull in fighting afforded the foreign legations the opportunity to re-establish contact with the outside world. On 18 July, Colonel Shiba sent a messenger to Tientsin, and when he returned he brought the welcome news that the allies had captured the walled city there and were forming a relief expedition to march on Peking soon. The distressed foreigners believed that the relief column would arrive on 20 July, but the day came and went with no news. A strange “half armistice” continued around the legations, with small outbreaks of violence punctuating sessions in which Chinese merchants sold eggs, fruit, and even weapons and ammunition to the foreigners.

Prince Ching and his fellow moderate General Jung-Lu pressed the ministers to leave Peking, promising safe conduct to Tientsin. Sir Claude and his fellow diplomats refused to comply, trying instead to read between the lines of each message to determine what the Imperial Court was up to. On 28 July, a messenger reached the compound from Tientsin with a perplexing letter from the British consul there. The message was vague as to if and when a relief column would ever arrive, but it urged the foreigners in Peking to stay put. The effect of the letter was to convince the ministers that they should prepare for the siege to continue, perhaps for another month or more. Angry, frustrated, and anxious, the ministers, their staffs and families, and the weary legation guards settled in for another uncertain wait.

The Battle of Tientsin, Phase 2

On 26 June (some reports suggest as early as 22 June), the War Department decided that since more than one regiment might be needed to relieve Peking, a general officer should be appointed to command the American land forces in China. They selected fifty-eight-year-old Adna R. Chaffee, a veteran of the Civil War, the Indian Wars, and, most recently, the Spanish-American War. Born in Orwell, Ohio, Chaffee enlisted in the Union Army in 1861 and served as an enlisted man in the Peninsular Campaign and at the Battle of Antietam. By the end of the war, Chaffee had been commissioned and promoted to first lieutenant. He opted to remain in

the Army and fought in the Indian Wars for twenty-seven years, finally rising to colonel in 1897. When the Spanish-American War broke out, he was given command of a brigade of volunteers and fought at the bloody Battle of El Caney. Promoted to brigadier general and then major general of volunteers, Chaffee served as chief of staff to the military governor of Cuba for a year and a half and was promoted in the Regular Army to colonel in 1899.

As an Indian fighter, Chaffee had learned the tradition of small-unit independent action and innovation. Although the campaigns to pacify the American West did little to inculcate the art of conventional war among U.S. Army officers, the veterans of the Indian Wars were proficient at land navigation, the organization and administration of small units, and small-scale logistics. Later, in the war with Spain, Chaffee experienced firsthand the deadly potential of smokeless powder and rapid-firing rifles and artillery. Although the War Department gave him no staff and no contingency plans for his mission in China, Chaffee was well prepared to operate in the foreign cultures he would find there.

Meanwhile, from Manila, General Arthur MacArthur, chafing at the loss of manpower to the China Relief effort and perhaps hoping for the prestige that a march to Peking might offer, made a bid for taking command of the expedition himself. A series of telegrams passed between Manila and Washington as MacArthur sparred with the Secretary of War, Elihu Root. When Root and Corbin increased the pressure on the general to comply with their wishes regarding reinforcing the effort in China, MacArthur replied that he would attend to it “with as much perfection and energy as though I believed in the wisdom of such a policy.”³ In a taut reply, Corbin directed:

*The President has appointed Chaffee a major-general of volunteers and assigned him to command of the relief expedition in China, which will constitute an independent command. The troops sent from your division will be reported as on detached service and will be returned to you as soon as the work in hand will admit... Secretary War notes with pleasure your proffer of services, but is of the opinion that the importance of the work that you have in hand is so great that your presence in Manila is demanded by the best interests of the service... Having reference to previous cables, you will prepare plans for forwarding additional force, but none will be put under way until further instructed.*⁴

Chaffee arrived in San Francisco on the evening of 1 July and went directly aboard the Army transport USS *Grant*. The ship left that evening, but after sailing about fifteen miles, the crew discovered a leak in the steam pipe, and the captain ordered the ship back to port. Chaffee waited two days for repairs to be completed and then departed again on the morning of 3 July. After exactly three weeks, he arrived at Nagasaki on the morning of 24 July. During the voyage, events had unfolded rapidly in China, and by the time the general arrived at Taku, the first American regiment on the ground there had already been blooded.

The situation at Tientsin had not improved much since the concessions had been relieved. At the beginning of July, the allies had about 10,000 troops occupying the concessions, with another 10,000 at Taku. Of this number, only about 6,000 had the training and equipment to participate in a serious assault. The Boxers were firmly established in the walled city and

3 General Arthur MacArthur to Adjutant General Henry C. Corbin, 18 July 1900, cited in Eric T. Smith, “That Memorable Campaign: American Experiences in the China Relief Expedition During the 1900 Boxer Rebellion,” Master’s Thesis (Carlisle, PA: Dickinson College, 1994), p. 16.

4 Adjutant General Corbin to General MacArthur, 20 July 1900; *Annual Report*, p. 156.

its environs, including the West Arsenal. Repeated shelling and attacks on the railroad station kept the foreign troops busy, and the allied commanders fretted over when and how to assault the enemy stronghold. The recent failure of Admiral Seymour's expedition, coupled with the friction that naturally attends a coalition of multinational troops, left the commanders wallowing in indecision. Concerning attack plans on Tientsin, Major Waller seemed more knowledgeable than other Americans on the scene. His reports chronicle the frustrating delays while the allied officers awaited reinforcements.

On 2 July, Waller reported that a large body of 10,000 Imperial troops was allegedly en route to Tientsin and that a council of war was considering attacking the walled city that day. The Russians demurred, claiming that they were not ready. Waller pressed for an immediate attack, because the walled city was supposedly held only by guards who were not friendly to the Boxers. Nevertheless, by the end of the day, the allies had decided to postpone the attack until 4 July.

Before the allies could carry out the proposed attack, Chinese Imperial forces under General Nieh entered the city. A fleeting opportunity had been lost, and the allies would now have a much harder fight on their hands. The two sides began shelling each other, which multiplied the number of wounded but did little to decide the fate of the city. Meanwhile, the allied commanders on the ground wired their respective countries, pleading for reinforcements and small river craft to alleviate the critical need for transportation.

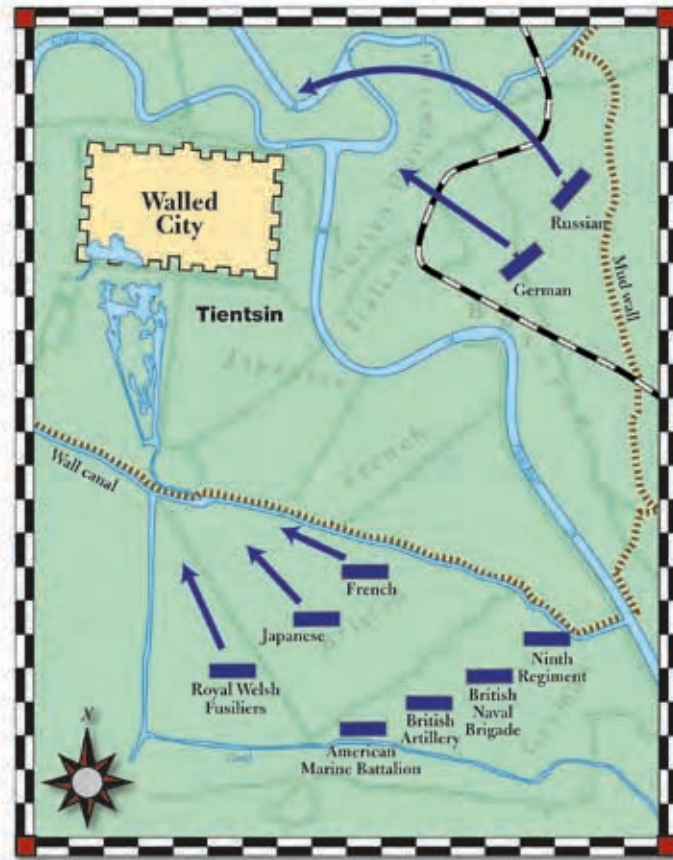
Relations among the allied powers at this point seemed relatively friendly and remarkably free of serious strife. Factors contributing to the cooperative spirit included a shared mutual contempt for the Chinese as well as a sense of peril should their forces be cut off from the coast. Official reports and correspondence indicated that all of the commanders made extensive use of liaisons. Still, since there was no strong, central command, decisions were made by impromptu councils of war. The plans that emanated from these gatherings were often short on detail and suffered from a lack of systematic reconnaissance.

On 12 July, Colonel R. L. Meade arrived in Tientsin with a fresh detachment of 318 Marines from the USS *Brooklyn* along with artillery and stores. Meade superseded Waller and took command of the Marines there. He found Waller and his force in the European concession in houses that were under enemy shell fire every night. Meade reported that the foreign concessions in Tientsin were held by the allied forces but that the walled city and all other portions of Tientsin were strongly fortified and held by the Chinese. American forces took turns with the other troops of the alliance in guarding the railway station, which was an exposed area almost continually under shell fire.⁵

The final assault on the walled city occurred on 13 July, and the delay left just enough time for the first U.S. Army regiment to arrive and participate in the battle. The Ninth Infantry, under the command of Colonel Liscum, had departed Manila on 27 June and arrived off Taku on 6 July. The colonel disembarked with the First and Second Battalions and pressed on to Tientsin, reaching the city on 11 July. The movement from Taku to Tientsin suffered—as it would over the next two months—from lack of transport. The problem was exacerbated by an almost total lack of coordination and cooperation among the allies. Officers scrambled to commandeer river boats and attach their national flags in order to meet their units' growing need for transportation with little thought for pooling assets.

5 Report of the Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., 29 September 1900; from the NHC web site, <http://www.history.navy.mil/docs/boxer/boxer2.htm> (accessed 3 October 2007).

Battle of Tientsin, 13 July 1900



Approach march
5:00 a.m.

When Colonel Liscum arrived in Tientsin, he joined with the American Marines already there under the command of Colonel Meade. By virtue of seniority, Meade assumed overall command of American forces in the city. Preparations for the impending attack were already under way. The various foreign armies marshaled in the outlying concessions south and east of the city center, providing security for noncombatants and protecting their respective compounds. But taking the walled city and destroying the Boxers inside would require concerted action, which in turn necessitated close coordination among the allied armies.

Among the various contingents, the Japanese were the most numerous and energetic, and it was their commander, General Yamagutchi, who set the pace of preparations. Because there was no love lost between the Russians and Japanese, the commanders planned to use two columns. The Russians and Germans would encircle the city from the east and northeast, while the Japanese, British, French, and Americans would attack the southern wall as the main effort. The Americans had arrived late with only one regiment and a composite battalion of Marines, so they acquiesced to serve under Brigadier General A. R. F. Dorward, the British commander at Tientsin, who in turn was happy to have them.

In what was to be the Americans' first major engagement of the Boxer crisis, the Battle of Tientsin, although a victory, was a disaster for the Ninth Regiment. The details of the battle emerge from eyewitness accounts and the sketch maps they left behind.

Colonels Meade and Liscum attended a conference on the evening of 12 July at which General Dorward explained how the Americans would support the plan for the assault on the walled city. The general asked Colonel Meade to provide 1,000 men—Meade’s Marines making up a third of that number, with the remainder comprising the Ninth Regiment. The Japanese and French would form a column on the right, and the British and Americans would form another on the left. The troops were to muster early the next morning, but no further details were available on how the attack would proceed. In all, about 6,000 allied troops faced about 30,000 Chinese, both Boxers and Imperial troops. Since Liscum attended the meeting without any of his officers and was later killed, we have no record of his understanding of the plan. None of his subordinates seemed to have any idea of the plan beyond following the British in column of march and deploying where and when they were told. Subsequent events point to an almost total lack of coordination, planning, and reconnaissance.

The American troops mustered at about 3:00 a.m. near Tientsin University toward the southern end of the concessions. The Royal Welsh Fusiliers headed the British column. The Marines under Colonel Meade—22 officers and 326 men, along with three 3-inch guns and three Colt automatic guns—were next in the column of march, followed by the British Naval Artillery, the British Naval Brigade, and finally the Ninth Regiment. Thus, although the regiment was nominally under the command of Colonel Meade, they were already separated from him before the march commenced. Liscum would have no contact with Meade throughout the battle and operated on his own under the supervision of General Dorward. The plan, such as it was, called for a subsequent commanders’ conference once the column advanced closer to the defenders. As events played out, no such meeting occurred, and all remaining decisions were made under fire.

The column marched westward for about two hours. At about 5:30 a.m., the southern allied column formed a line of battle facing the West Arsenal, which was situated behind a mud wall and an east–west canal to the south of the walled city. There the Japanese, British, American Marines, and French exchanged artillery and rifle fire with the arsenal defenders, and the allied frontline advanced slowly toward the mud wall.

The Ninth Regiment was behind the main line “as a reserve in line of battle fronting the West Arsenal at a distance of 800 yards,” according to Major Lee’s official report.⁶ Unfortunately, the Chinese rifle fire coming from the arsenal dropped onto the fields where the regiment waited and caused many casualties, especially among C Company. After about forty-five minutes, an unnamed staff officer under General Dorward approached Colonel Liscum and advised him to move forward to the protection of the mud wall.⁷ Once they were across the canal, the Americans were to move into the line to the left of the Japanese, who in turn would continue directly north toward the Taku Gate of the walled city.

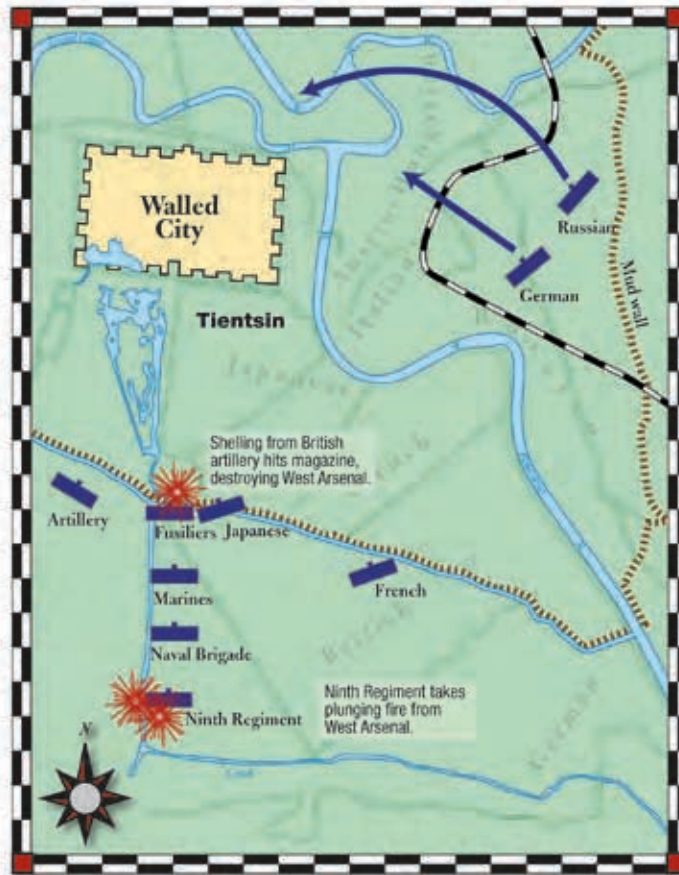
As the attack bogged down south of the West Arsenal, good fortune suddenly smiled on the allies. The naval battery of the HMS *Terrible* had opened fire on the forts and guns of the enemy just before Colonel Meade’s force arrived at the mud wall, and the Chinese were returning fire. Suddenly, at about 5:45 a.m., the Chinese magazine exploded with a terrific shock, which was distinctly felt a mile and a half away. The defenders who could still walk scurried away and the allies swarmed into the ruined facility.

Meanwhile, Colonel Meade’s Marines had formed a line of battle along with the British on the left. Leaving their artillery behind to provide fire support, the two forces advanced across the canal and mud wall and began to conduct fire and maneuver toward the southwest corner

6 Major J. M. Lee, Report of the Battle of Tientsin, 13 July 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 19–22.

7 Captain C. R. Noyes, 13 July 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 22–23.

Battle of Tientsin (continued)



Attack on the West Arsenal
6:00 a.m.

of the walled city. The Chinese defenders kept up a vigorous fire, but Meade's men made good use of the ditches, grave mounds, and dikes and were able to advance to within 800 yards of the city walls. There Meade found that the ground prevented any further movement. To the north, Chinese Imperial troops atop the walls fired rifles down on the attackers. To the northwest, large numbers of Boxers sniped at the Americans and British from the suburbs outside the walls. Several times the red-clad mobs tried to work around the Marines' left flank, but Meade directed his troops to redeploy each time to thwart the enemy. Ammunition began to run low, and Meade worried that his men would be pinned in a killing ground with no means to resist.⁸ Unable to move and low on supplies, they maintained their position until Meade received the order to withdraw at around 8:00 p.m. Still under fire, the Marines began to move to the rear in small groups by rushes. The wounded were recovered with great difficulty, but the dead remained where they fell until the following day when they were buried on site. The Marines had had a tough day, but their fellow soldiers in the Ninth Regiment fared even worse.

After soaking up casualties from plunging fire south of the West Arsenal, the regiment was ordered forward to the relative protection of the mud wall. Once there, they had to cross the wall

⁸ Report of the Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., 29 September 1900; from the NHC web site, <http://www.history.navy.mil/docs/boxer/boxer2.htm> (accessed 3 October 2007).

canal on a causeway and from there over a bridge into the West Arsenal. As the regiment began crossing, General Dorward, Colonel Liscum, Captain Noyes, and a few other staff officers hastily conversed under fire. Noyes reminded the others that the original order placed the Americans to the left of the Japanese, but when no one could recall who had given that order, General Dorward shouted, “It makes no difference which, to the right or left, as long as they get under cover.”⁹

The Americans began to follow the Japanese as the latter first occupied the arsenal and then moved out along the main road toward the walled city. Colonel Liscum understood his orders to support the Japanese advance, so he guided the regiment to the right of the main road. There he found a raised roadway angling northeast, and he directed the regiment, now marching in a column of files, to the right of the road. Thus, while Meade’s Marines were angling toward the northwest, Liscum’s men headed northeast. This movement accomplished two things. First, it put a bit of distance between the Americans and Japanese, so that when necessary, the Americans could form a line of battle and make the best use of their rifles. Second, it provided frontal cover from the Chinese firing from the walled city.

Unfortunately, the move also exposed the regiment to unexpected rifle fire that suddenly erupted from a fortified mud village to the east, about 1,200 yards away. Colonel Liscum at this point made a fateful decision: he ordered the regiment to face about and advance against the village. As the regiment began its difficult march east and slightly north, they faced increasing small arms fire from the unseen enemy and almost impassable ground that offered very little cover. Between the regiment and the mud huts lay canals, flooded fields, and ditches. Liscum continued to move along the road, which afforded him the best visibility of the objective and his own troops. But it also left the indomitable colonel exposed to the worst the enemy could give.

The regiment, led by B Company, advanced rapidly to within 200 yards of the still-invisible enemy firing from mud huts, but at that point, with casualties mounting quickly and with an “unfordable canal” blocking the way, all forward movement ceased. Major James Regan, commander of Second Battalion, fell wounded, and at least one company commander also went down. Just before 9:00 a.m., Major Lee, the First Battalion commander, was notified that Colonel Liscum had been mortally wounded and was languishing in a trench. Lee took command of the regiment, but by then there was little he could do. Advance was impossible, retreat equally so, and for the rest of the day the regiment hugged the ground—some of the men standing in water up to their armpits—trying not to get hit. Runners made the perilous journey to the rear, and through them Lee was able to ask for reinforcements to help extract the regiment. Toward the end of the day, a contingent from the British Naval Brigade, along with some American Marines, provided effective covering fire, and in the gathering darkness, the regiment made its way back to safety. By day’s end, Colonel Liscum and sixteen enlisted men had perished, and four officers and sixty-seven men had been wounded.

Reading through the official reports, it is difficult to understand the scale of the fiasco that was the Ninth Regiment’s baptism of fire. The officers who crafted the reports wrote with the stylized, stolid tone expected of them, reserving their passion only for praising each other. They accepted responsibility for their decisions, but little was said of the obvious tactical blunders that led to the pointless bloodshed among the Americans. The mistakes were the product of inexperience, faulty leadership, and the friction of foreign armies trying to work together without the benefit of formal arrangements or organization.

Throughout the planning and execution of the assault on 13 July, there was a lamentable lack of reconnaissance. The mud village from which the enemy extracted such a high price from

9 Reports of Major Lee and Captain Noyes, 13 July 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 19–22 and pp. 22–23, respectively.



Battle of Tientsin (continued)



Attack south of the Walled City
9:00 a.m.–dusk

the Ninth Regiment escaped the notice of the allied officers until it was too late. If the enemy presence to the northeast had been anticipated, a few guns could have helped suppress the devastating enemy rifle fire. The leaders compounded this oversight by failing to understand the condition of the ground near the walled city.

General Dorward and Colonels Meade and Liscum had demonstrated a limited understanding of the effects of the terrain and enemy weapons as they approached the West Arsenal. Major Lee reported that the regiment initially halted south of the canal to act as a reserve. Yet within minutes, they began to suffer casualties from plunging fire. A true reserve, if it is to be useful, must be held in a protected position from which it can freely maneuver to either reinforce success or retrieve failure. Instead, the Americans sat in an open field soaking up casualties for forty-five minutes before marching forward toward shelter.

Just as the British were learning in action against the Boers in Transvaal, the officers who commanded at the Battle of Tientsin discovered the power of rifles and smokeless powder. The early twentieth century would eventually see the death of the notion that gallantry and bayonets could overcome massed, accurate small arms fire, but that lesson would have to be reiterated at Verdun, Ypres, and the Somme before the generation of officers got the point. Colonel Liscum's decision to face about and advance against a fortified enemy 1,200 yards away across

difficult terrain was questionable, even for a relatively inexperienced officer. When faced with a distant ambush, a more effective course of action would have been to return fire (preferably with artillery) and maneuver away rather than to charge toward the enemy with little hope of closing to bayonet range.

Ultimately, responsibility for the faulty positioning of the Marines and Ninth Regiment must rest with Brigadier General Dorward. He himself accepted the blame—at least in part—in his correspondence of 15 July:

I blame myself for the mistake made in taking up of their position by the Ninth Regiment, not remembering that troops wholly fresh to the scene of action and hurried forward in the excitement of attack were likely to lose their way. Still the position they took up and gallantly stuck to all day undoubtedly prevented a large body of the enemy from turning the right of the attacking line and inflicting serious loss on the French and Japanese.¹⁰

Dorward's explanation was courteous but disingenuous. Lack of reconnaissance and planning put too many troops in a small area as the allies crossed the canal, and the general had no clear plan as to how to dispose the Americans once they were in the deadly zone. His suggestion that the accidental deployment of the Ninth Regiment in a half-flooded field somehow prevented the enemy from turning the allied line is plainly ridiculous. The Chinese could not have advanced across the “unfordable canal” that protected the mud village or the flooded field any better than the Americans did, and if the enemy had been foolish enough to try, they would have been cut to pieces by allied fire from the mud wall. Neither the Boxers nor the Imperial Chinese showed much capacity for sudden flanking maneuvers throughout the crisis at any rate. The deployment of the Ninth Regiment on 13 July was simply a blunder—a costly one. Royal Navy Commander David Beatty, who led a contingent of British seamen, laid the blame entirely at General Dorward's feet, observing that soldiers “were lying out in the open without any cover in a stupid place, as the bullets kept falling all round.”¹¹

Dorward also revealed that at the critical moment—when the Ninth Regiment was beginning its maneuver northeast—the general was not in a position to exercise effective command and control. His attention instead was to the northwest, where the Marines and British contingent were facing the Boxers in the suburbs to the west of the walled city. Thus, when the disaster descended on them, the Ninth Regiment was isolated, with no hope of aid from the rest of the allied force.

As 13 July ended, little progress had been made save the destruction of the West Arsenal. The Japanese had made several valiant efforts to destroy the south gate of the walled city by planting mines there. But each time Chinese troops rushed in and cut the fuses before they could detonate. The allies licked their wounds, and many of the troops spent the night awaiting the resumption of the attack the next morning.

At 3:00 a.m. on 14 July, an intrepid Japanese engineer volunteered to rush the south gate and light a short-fused mine to blow the gate. When the mine in fact destroyed the gate, his bravery paid huge dividends but only at the cost of his life. The allied forces poured into the city, but they found most of the Imperial troops and Boxers already gone. Colonel Meade reported that the city was found “filled with dead Chinamen and animals.” No resistance was made to

10 Brigadier General A. R. F. Dorward, 20 July 1900, *Annual Report*, p. 156.

11 Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China's War on Foreigners That Shook the World in the Summer of 1900* (New York: Berkley Books, 2000), p. 186.

the occupation in the walled city itself, but the Japanese continued to trade fire with Boxers in the suburbs to the west. Panicked civilians jammed the north gate trying to escape, and some indiscriminate slaughter ensued. The allied troops, poorly supervised by their exhausted officers, took to plundering the city. Word of the breakdown of discipline soon reached foreign capitals, and the War Department wired Lieutenant Colonel Coolidge, who had succeeded to command of the Ninth Regiment, to find out the degree of American culpability:

Reported here extensive looting in Tientsin. Report immediately whether American troops took part. If so, punish severely; repress sternly. Absolute regard for life and property of noncombatants enjoined.

Coolidge wired back his response on 25 July:

Looting by American troops walled city Tientsin unfounded and denied. Silver taken from burned mint under direction, Meade, commanding, who was invalidated today. No property destroyed except under military exigency. American troops have orders to protect life and property noncombatants in American southeast quarter city assigned them.¹²

The War Department apparently was not satisfied with this brief denial, and Coolidge, who had become the senior American officer in Tientsin when Colonel Meade became ill, wrote a follow-on report, appending accounts from Majors Waller and Lee. Coolidge alleged that most of the reported looting was perpetrated by the Chinese Imperial troops and Boxers before they fled the city. There was undoubtedly some truth to his claim. He insisted that after the city was partitioned among the allies, he supervised the procurement of some needed supplies. He confiscated the silver by order of Colonel Meade and delivered it to the Hong Kong Bank for the United States.¹³

Coolidge's report is unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, he was not present when the American troops first entered the city—the time, in fact, when most of the looting and destruction occurred. Second, his report addresses conditions after the partitioning of the city but does not mention the troops' behavior beforehand. Both Majors Waller and Lee insisted that most of the looting was done by the Chinese themselves, although several other incidents perpetrated by Sikhs and some French soldiers had been detected and stopped. But the reports do not discuss the critical day, 14 July, when most of the looting occurred. The general consensus of historians is that once the south gate was breached, the foreign attackers, including Americans, entered the city and indulged in looting and some indiscriminate killing until the next day. To their credit, the allied powers (less the French, who refused to be included) quickly organized martial law and restored order to the city by 16 July.

The Battle of Tientsin cost the allies about 750 casualties. It had taken the commanders almost a full month from the time reinforcements relieved the concessions until the city was secured as a base for a relief expedition to Peking. The general assumption until the end of July was that it was already too late for the unfortunate foreigners in the capital. However, as messages began to get through, it became clear that the ministers and their staffs, families, and guards were still alive—or had been when the messages were composed. If there was to be any hope of avoiding a massacre, the forces in Tientsin would have to get under way quickly.

¹² Major General Adna R. Chaffee's Report on the China Relief Expedition, excerpt from *Five Years of the War Department Following the War with Spain, 1899–1903* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. War Department, 1904), pp. 395–407; from http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/China.html (accessed 1 October 2007).

¹³ Lieut. Col. Charles A. Coolidge, Report in Regard to Looting at Tientsin, China, 26 July 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 26–27.

Admiral Kempff had reported in mid-July the general consensus of the allied officers that some 80,000 troops would be needed to march to Peking. American reinforcements continued to be dispatched from San Francisco and Manila. In all, some 15,500 American soldiers, sailors, and Marines would eventually see service in China, but less than a third would arrive in time to march to Peking. In the meantime, the American military presence was small but growing. In addition to the Ninth Regiment, the Fourteenth Regiment and Light Battery F, Fifth Artillery arrived at Taku by the end of July.

General Chaffee arrived in Nagasaki on 24 July after a three-week voyage across the Pacific. He arranged a meeting aboard Admiral Kempff's flagship, the USS *Newark*, and the two men spoke with the American consul in Japan and the provincial governor of Nagasaki-ken concerning the situation in China. While waiting two days for the USS *Grant* to take on coal, Chaffee received another wire from the War Department directing him to sail to Taku and assume command of American forces in China. The order specified that his command would be called the "China Relief Expedition." He would find elements of the Ninth and Fourteenth Infantry, along with a battery of the Fifth Artillery and a battalion of Marines in theater. The transport USS *Sumner* was en route from San Francisco with the Second Battalion, Fifteenth Regiment, and some recruits for replacements. Chaffee was sailing with eight troops of the Sixth Cavalry, but they had neither horses nor provisions for forage. The War Department anticipated a constant flow of reinforcements that would bring Chaffee's strength up to 5,000 and eventually 10,000. The Department ordered the remainder of the Sixth Cavalry to China, but Chaffee was told not to wait for their arrival. According to the telegram, American officials had received word that the civilians in Peking were already dead but that "Chinese representatives insist to the contrary."¹⁴

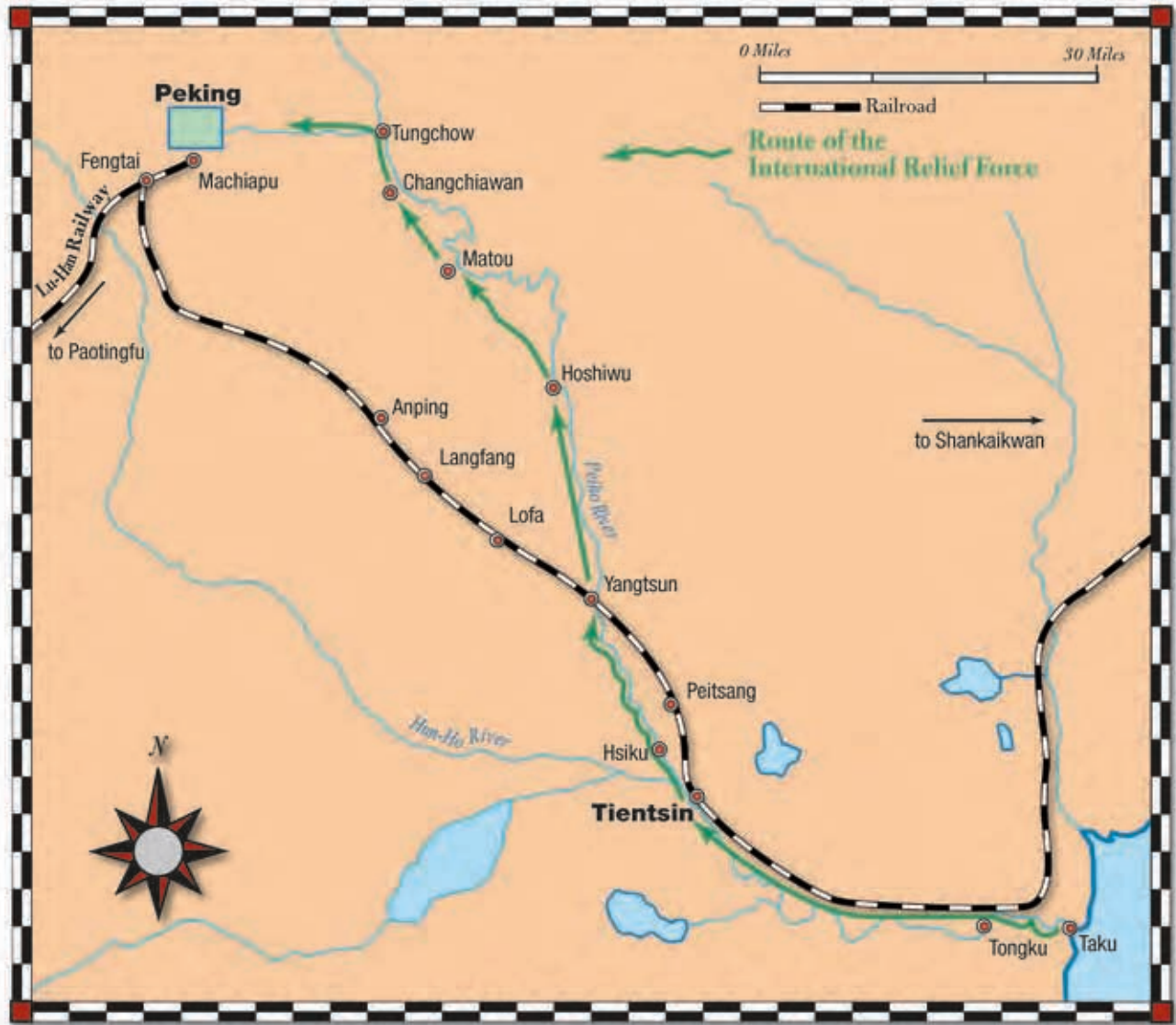
As to how Chaffee's forces were to operate with forces of the other nations involved, the order directed him to cooperate with allied forces at his discretion, but he was to maintain the integrity of the American division. In other words, the China Relief Expedition would operate as an independent command in voluntary cooperation with other countries. Chaffee was also instructed to maintain friendly relations with those Chinese not implicated in anti-foreign violence. The order singled out the recently appointed governor of Chihli Province, Li Hung Chang, as a potential friend.

The *Grant* departed for the three-day trip to Taku on 26 July, arriving at daybreak on 29 July. The harbor was filled with transports and warships from every nation, including the American transport USS *Indiana*, which had delivered elements of the Fourteenth Infantry, Colonel A. S. Daggett commanding. Admiral George Remy updated Chaffee on the situation in Tientsin, and the general then debarked and headed for Tongku. Along the way he directed two assistants to "secure" lighters and tugs to move American supplies along the Peiho River. He arrived in Tientsin around noon on 30 July.

Chaffee found Lieutenant Colonel Coolidge in command of the Ninth Regiment and judged the outfit to be in bad shape following their recent battle. Colonel Daggett's Fourteenth Regiment was fresh and ready for action. Major Littleton Waller was again in command of his company of Marines, and another battalion under the command of Major William P. Biddle was en route to the city. The resourceful Captain Henry J. Reilly commanded Light Battery F, Fifth Artillery. Chaffee's biggest challenge by the end of July was transportation. A mere nineteen wagons and four ambulances were on hand to service the American Division. It would take much more transport and efficient organization of resources to solve the logistical problems facing the Americans. The question remained whether Chaffee and his colleagues could mount an expedition in time.

14 Adjutant General Corbin to Major General Chaffee, 19 July 1900, *Annual Report*, p. 154.

The China Relief Expedition



4-14 August 1900

August

"I'll try, sir!"

On 1 August, General Adna Chaffee attended a commanders' conference in Tientsin to plan the advance to Peking. With clear evidence that the diplomatic legations were still intact but hard-pressed, the relief expedition would have to depart soon. Reinforcements had brought the coalition strength to almost 20,000, and although the Chinese Imperial troops and their Boxer militias outnumbered them by far, the foreigners were confident that their superior weapons and training would prevail. There was also the growing belief that if they did not march soon, there might be nothing left to rescue.

The army that departed Tientsin on 4 August included 8,000 Japanese, 4,800 Russians, 3,000 British, 2,100 Americans,¹ and 500 French. Chaffee marched with the Fourteenth Regiment (Colonel A. S. Daggett), elements of the Ninth Regiment (Colonel Charles Coolidge), a composite battalion of Marines (Majors William P. Biddle and Littleton Waller), Captain Henry J. Reilly's Light Battery, and a troop from the Sixth Cavalry. Since the cavalry regiment's horses had not yet arrived, Chaffee ordered them to remain behind in Tientsin under the command of Lieutenant Colonel T. J. Wint, along with a company of Marines, to help administer the civil government. He ordered the troops in the relief expedition to carry one day's rations in haversacks, four days' in wagons, and another ten days' provisions in the junks that followed the army. For the first time since the relief efforts had begun in May, the international force had organized their logistics fairly effectively. Transport was still scarce but sufficient.

Opposing the advance were an estimated 10,000–12,000 Chinese troops entrenched at Peitsang—about seven miles upriver from Tientsin, and another line of defense at Yangtsun. Beyond that, the situation was unknown. But since the rail line had certainly been destroyed beyond the bridge over the Peiho River, the allies decided to take an alternate route from Yangtsun to Peking instead of repeating Admiral Seymour's ill-fated advance. They elected to follow the river north to Tungchow and then assault the capital city from the east, using the river as the principal line of communications with Tientsin. They reasoned that it would be harder for the Chinese to interdict the river, and the troops would not be slowed or distracted by having to repair the railroad.

The relief expedition's next challenge was deciding on who would command the operation. Although in practice the armies would achieve a loose cooperation and reach their decisions through conferences and voting, long military tradition required at least notional adherence to the principle of unity of command. The choice of commander proved a difficult one. International rivalries were growing as a result of clashing imperialist ambitions, particularly in the Far East. The Russians made it clear from the start that they would not suffer their troops serving under an English, Japanese, or American commander-in-chief. France refused to serve under an English commander on the grounds that Admiral Seymour had already failed. The Japanese appeared to be the logical choice for overall command because they boasted the largest (and by some accounts the most effective) force, as well as the most senior general officer, Lieutenant General Yamagutchi, but Western governments insisted that they would not allow

¹ The precise number of Americans in the relief expedition varies from 2,000 to 2,500, but General Chaffee's telegraph of 3 August stated a strength of "2000 and battery"—a reference to Captain Reilly's Light Battery, Fifth Artillery. Reinforcements continued to arrive at the advancing front throughout the move to Peking, so that about 2,500 Americans entered the city at the time of the relief of the legations.

their contingents to serve under Japanese command. In the end, it was agreed that the supreme commander would be a German, in part because the Germans had few troops in theater and thus would not be in a strong position to press their views once Peking was taken. Field Marshal Alfred von Waldersee was designated to take command of the expedition, but he was not yet in theater and in fact arrived only after the coalition troops relieved the legations. In the interim, British General Sir Alfred Gaselee would be acting commander.

Gaselee insisted that the deteriorating situation in Peking mandated an immediate move. General Chaffee and the commander of the Fourteenth Regiment, Colonel Daggett, agreed. The Russians and French protested, however, claiming that a march in August would lead to heat exhaustion, or that torrential rains might disrupt the movement. They suggested postponing the expedition, perhaps until fall. Their actual motivation for delaying the departure from Tientsin most likely derived from their desire to have more troops so that they would be in a more dominant political position when Peking fell. Gaselee remained courteous, but he made it clear that if the other contingents chose to delay, the British and Americans would do the job alone. This the other countries could not risk, and they all agreed to depart within a few days.

General Chaffee had assembled a small staff to assist him in his command of the Americans in the relief expedition. Captain Grote Hutcheson of the Sixth U.S. Cavalry served as his adjutant general and Lieutenant Roy B. Harper of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry was his aide-de-camp. A Marine lieutenant who “spoke a little French” accompanied Chaffee to the commanders’ conference on 1 August. As the campaign progressed, Chaffee’s staff grew both in number and efficiency.

Cooperation among the American joint services was remarkable, given that no formal arrangements had been made. The American naval officers serving at Taku were cooperative, helpful, and instrumental in securing the required river transport for the expedition. The Marines fell under Chaffee’s command, but they tended to operate semi-independently of the Army units, even securing their own wagons for transportation of their logistics.

Dry Run: The Battle of Peitsang

The China Relief Expedition departed Tientsin on the afternoon of 4 August and halted for the evening at the Hsiku Arsenal, which had earlier been captured by Admiral Seymour’s expedition. From there the expedition planned to advance along the river with the Japanese, British, and Americans on the right (or south) bank of the Peiho River and the Russians on the left. The Japanese had reconnoitered the Chinese position at Peitsang and determined that they were entrenching in a line some three miles long from the right bank westward. An arsenal anchored the extreme right flank of the Chinese forces, and the allies intended to envelop them there. To that end, the Japanese were to march at 1:00 a.m. on 5 August, followed by the British and Americans in a column of march. They would proceed along a road around the Chinese flank, destroy the arsenal, and then march to the river, whereupon all three armies would face to the south and attack the Chinese trenches from the rear. Meanwhile, a Japanese battery would suppress the enemy outpost south of Peitsang and occupy the attention of the troops in the trenches.²

² Major General Adna R. Chaffee’s Report on the China Relief Expedition, excerpt from *Five Years of the War Department Following the War with Spain, 1899–1903* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. War Department, 1904), pp. 395–407; from http://www.shsu.edu/~his_npc/China.html (accessed 1 October 2007).

When the Japanese reached the Chinese arsenal, they discovered two factors that modified the attack plan. First, the ground around the enemy entrenchments was too constricted for the three national contingents to mass there. Second, they found the state of the enemy defenses to be poor. The Japanese decided not to wait for the British and Americans to complete their encircling maneuver and instead attacked the arsenal straightaway, destroying it easily. They pressed the attack and began routing the Chinese out of the trenches, chasing them all the way to the river. At about 5:00 a.m., the Japanese commander sent a message to the British and Americans requesting that they halt their columns, face north, and attack through the Chinese position. While the British prepared to comply, the Americans under Chaffee were obliged to march south and west around them to get into position. By the time they began their attack, the Japanese had completely routed the enemy and had captured the entire Peitsang position. It was just as well that the fighting was over; with three national contingents converging through constricted terrain under limited visibility, allied troops would probably have fired on each other.

At the end of the day, the allies bivouacked at the village of Tao-Wa-She, just northwest of Peitsang. The Americans had suffered no casualties and did not even get a shot off. They had, however, begun to experience the difficulty of operating with a foreign army over arduous terrain. Their chief adversary so far was the staggering heat.³

The Limits of Cooperation: The Battle of Yangtsun

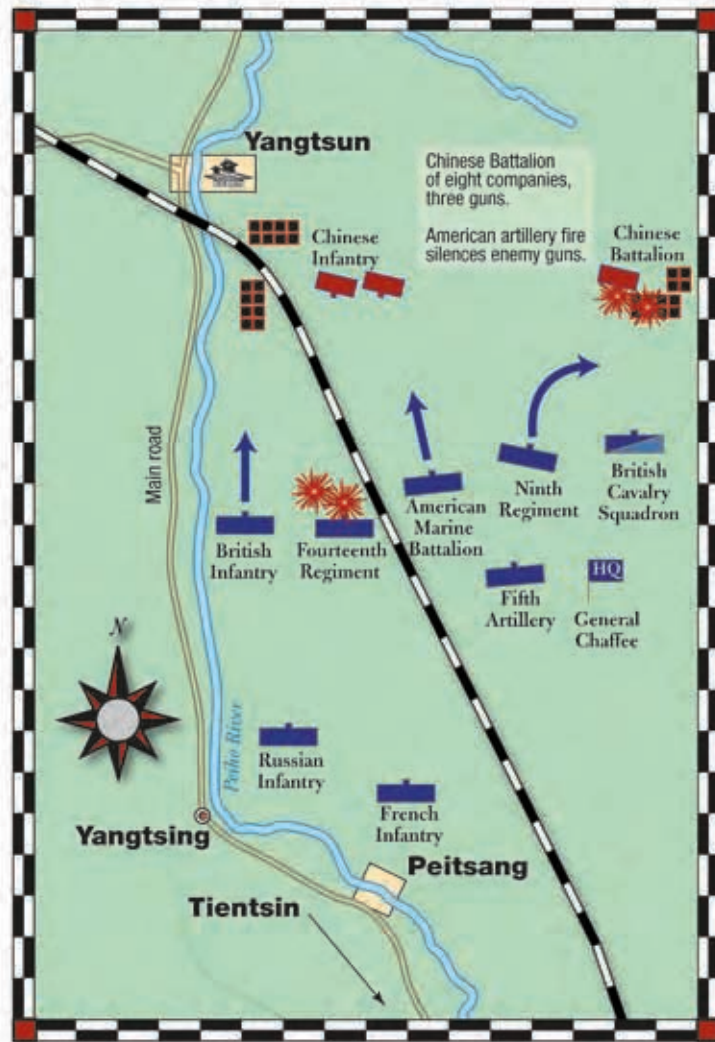
The remnants of the Peitsang defenders disappeared up the left bank of the Peiho River as the allies consolidated their position on the evening of 5 August. The energetic Japanese under General Yamaguchi had erected a pontoon bridge across the river at Peitsang. After discussions with Yamaguchi, General Chaffee's Americans crossed to the left bank and prepared to attack northward, oriented on the wrecked rail line toward Yangtsun. The British, French, and Russians likewise positioned themselves on the left bank and planned to move north along the river road that paralleled the rail line. The Japanese remained on the right bank and had to negotiate the more difficult terrain as the allies marched toward the enemy's main defense line.

The coalition forces moved out at about 6:00 a.m. on 6 August. The units on the left bank made contact with the enemy about a mile and a half south of Yangtsun, where the railroad and river road crossed the Peiho over a bridge. Here General Gaselee consulted with Chaffee and asked that the Americans support the British attack. According to Gaselee's plan, Chaffee would place the Fourteenth Regiment alongside the British to the west of the rail line. Chaffee with the Ninth Regiment, the Light Battery, the Marines, and a troop of British cavalry would advance along the east side and provide support for Gaselee's attack. The Russians marched to the west and rear of the British along the river. The plan was relatively simple, but this time the defenders were better positioned and more determined. As the allies had demonstrated at Tientsin, a persistent lack of both reconnaissance and detailed planning pervaded the ensuing battle.

As Chaffee moved out with his detachment, he came in contact with enemy troops firing from a village to the northeast. His British cavalry commander informed him that the enemy had eight companies and three guns there. Chaffee realized that he could not leave such a force to threaten the allies' right flank, so he directed his artillery to silence the guns and ordered the

³ Major General Chaffee's Report on the China Relief Expedition, excerpt from *Five Years of the War Department*; from http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/China.html.

Battle of Yangtsun



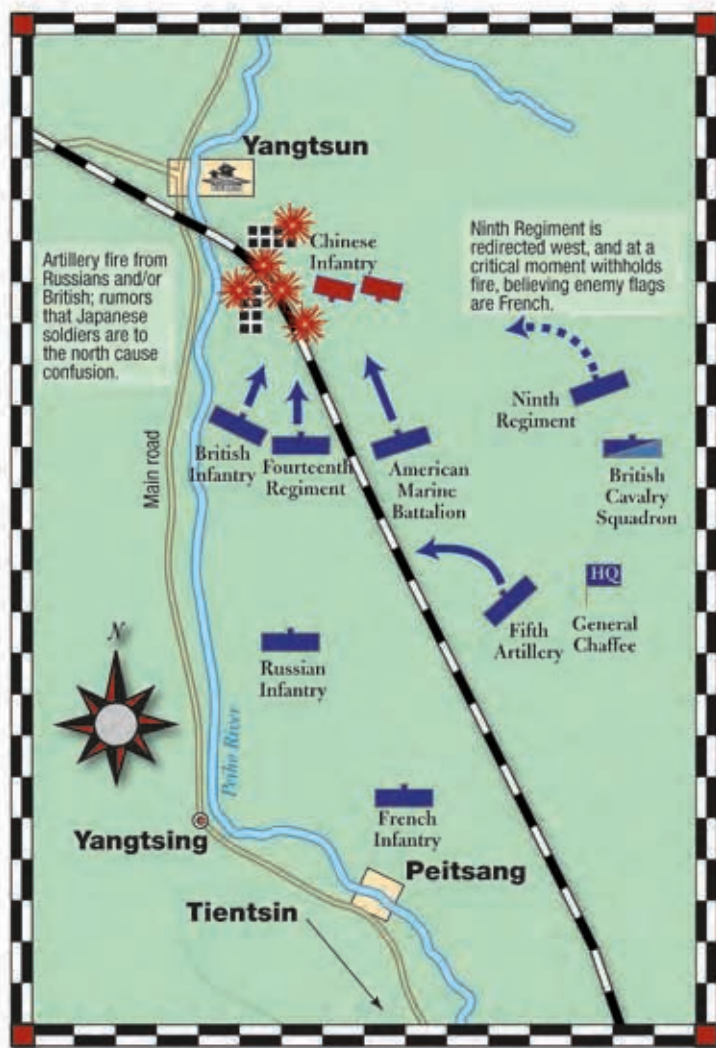
10:00 a.m.

Ninth Regiment and Marines to destroy the enemy infantry. A few moments later he received an urgent message from Gaselee requesting immediate support where the British and the Fourteenth Regiment were engaging the enemy to the north near Yangtsun. Chaffee was in a difficult position, having begun a risky maneuver against entrenched infantry to the east. Now, if he were to heed Gaselee's call, Chaffee would have to disengage and reverse direction to the west. Rankled at what he considered an overreaction on the part of Gaselee, Chaffee nevertheless decided to comply.⁴

The confusion of the orders and counterorders is best captured in the words of Colonel Coolidge, commanding the Ninth Regiment:

⁴ Major General Chaffee's Report on the China Relief Expedition, excerpt from *Five Years of the War Department*; from http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/China.html.

Battle of Yangtsun



11:00 a.m.

Captain Crozier then came up and said he had been directed by the commanding general to show me the line of attack of the Ninth Infantry, viz., to the village on our right. The direction of the line of battle was then changed more to the northeast, on the village... Captain Hutcheson, adjutant-general, came up and directed me to change the direction of the Ninth Infantry line on to the water tower of the railroad and proceed toward that point, which I started to comply with, when another staff officer came up and directed me to move on to the village on our right. I again changed the line of attack upon the village.⁵

⁵ Colonel Charles A. Coolidge, Peking, China, 20 August 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 51–52.

With the enemy to the east at least silenced if not destroyed, the general directed his artillery and Marines back toward the railroad. His plan was to position his guns on the twenty-foot-high embankment, and in short order his battery was ready to fire. Just as Captain Reilly's men were about to pull their lanyards and open fire, Chaffee noticed some men of the Fourteenth Regiment climbing the embankment in front of the guns. He ordered an immediate cease-fire, but moments later the gunners came under accurate small arms fire from the fields to their front. Chinese snipers and small teams of infantry were concealed there and were firing on the Americans. Captain Reilly responded by orienting his guns toward the enemy fire and unleashing a barrage of canister shot. The Marines joined the action and soon suppressed the enemy rifle fire. As the Ninth Regiment maneuvered onto the right flank of the Marines and artillery, an opportunity emerged for the Americans to inflict a crushing defeat on the disrupted enemy before them. But the confusion and frustrations that often accompany combat operations—what the famous military philosopher Karl von Clausewitz termed “friction”—were about to intervene.

Earlier in the day, Chaffee had received warnings from his fellow allied commanders to avoid accidentally firing on Russian or French troops that were allegedly maneuvering against the enemy's defenses at Yangtsun. According to the messages, the Russian column, with French troops attached, was attacking from the direction of the river in a semicircle curving to the east with the intention of flanking the Chinese position. In reality, neither the Russians nor the French were anywhere near the front line, but the rumor of their advance caused Chaffee and his officers to direct their fires cautiously. As Colonel Coolidge led his Ninth Regiment forward to support his sister regiment, he spotted regimental flags to the north, which he mistook for French units. At the very moment when the Ninth might have inflicted a fatal blow to the Chinese defenders, Coolidge ordered his men to hold their fire.⁶

Meanwhile, to the west of the embankment, the Fourteenth Regiment was enduring the worst of the fighting. Colonel Daggett's men were advancing in a column of battalions led by Major William Quinton's Third Battalion, followed by Captain Frank Eastman's Second Battalion. By the time the regiment made contact with the defenders at Yangtsun, the troops were exhausted from marching in the extreme heat. The Americans advanced in an open formation to within about a mile of the enemy when they came under artillery fire. Quinton and his officers maneuvered their battalion northward, and when they had closed to within 1,500 yards of the enemy, the Chinese opened fire. At this point on the battlefield, the attack frontage was narrowing as the railroad and river road converged toward the Yangtsun bridge. As a consequence, the British troops to the left of Daggett's men, including a Sikh regiment, began to overlap the American left, increasing the confusion and the danger of fratricide. When the lead units closed to within 300 yards of the enemy village, Daggett ordered the troops to halt and concentrate their rifle fire on the Chinese position. Once satisfied that they had suppressed the enemy's fire, the colonel led a joint assault—British and Americans—that routed the enemy. The Fourteenth Regiment's trials were not over yet, however.

Daggett reported afterward that in the final assault on the village, the Americans were “a little more rapid in their movements” than the British, so that Daggett's men reached the enemy position first. There they came under intense artillery fire from three directions at once. Daggett and Chaffee believed that it was British or Russian artillery that had fired on the American troops. The final verdict in the official reports written a month after the fact was that the Russians had fired artillery on the village at the request of the British. The unfortunate results were attributed to the confusion that resulted from the British measuring the artillery adjustments in yards while the Russian gunners calculated in meters. It is difficult to determine, on the basis of the carefully

⁶ Colonel Coolidge, 20 August 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 51–52.

worded reports, whether this theory was accurate or an invention devised to protect the British and American officers at the expense of the Russians. Nevertheless, the incident pointed clearly to a lack of reconnaissance, planning, and coordination among the allies, and the American Fourteenth Regiment paid heavily for the mistakes: seven were killed and fifty-seven wounded in the assault on the village.⁷

Daggett's men, exhausted and weakened by casualties, continued their attack through the enemy position, finally clearing everything to the west and south of the railroad embankment. From there they crossed the embankment and advanced to within 500 yards of a group of buildings protected by a wall. Daggett lamented in his report that with one fresh company he could have immediately cleared the position, but his men were completely spent. Several died of heat exhaustion, and the best Daggett could do was post sharpshooters who successfully suppressed the Chinese.

The Fourteenth Regiment's attack on the Chinese position at Yangtsun left its commander and his officers frustrated and angry. Colonel Daggett's report of the action contains a mysterious and atypical hint of ire toward an unnamed party: "For reasons which it might not be best to embody in this report, but which I will state to the General verbally, I deemed it my duty to lead the assault on the village in person." It is unclear whether Daggett was implying criticism of his own officers and men or dissatisfaction with his British allies. The latter is more likely, given General Chaffee's later report of the battle. Daggett was an experienced and capable officer, but he felt compelled to justify his actions and the conduct of his regiment. Two years earlier, following the Battle of El Caney against the Spanish, Daggett had written an account of the fighting in which he took issue with his brigade commander's report. He had commanded the Twenty-Fifth Regiment in that battle and reported that—although it pained him to boast about himself—he felt it was important to explain the contributions that he and his regiment made to the success of the American attack. Perhaps smarting from the controversy that his report of El Caney likely caused, the colonel was more veiled in his written criticism after the battle of Yangtsun.⁸

Captain Eastman's report lamented that his Second Battalion advanced all the way into the village without firing a shot. His unit was trailing the Third Battalion, and although they contributed little to the fight, they endured both enemy fire and the prostrating effects of the heat. Eastman also complained about the confusion among the allies that pervaded the fighting. He reported that once he reached the village, he felt compelled to order his troops to withhold their fire when British officers insisted that they were firing on Japanese troops—an allegation almost certainly untrue.

Eastman also found fault with his own noncommissioned officers.

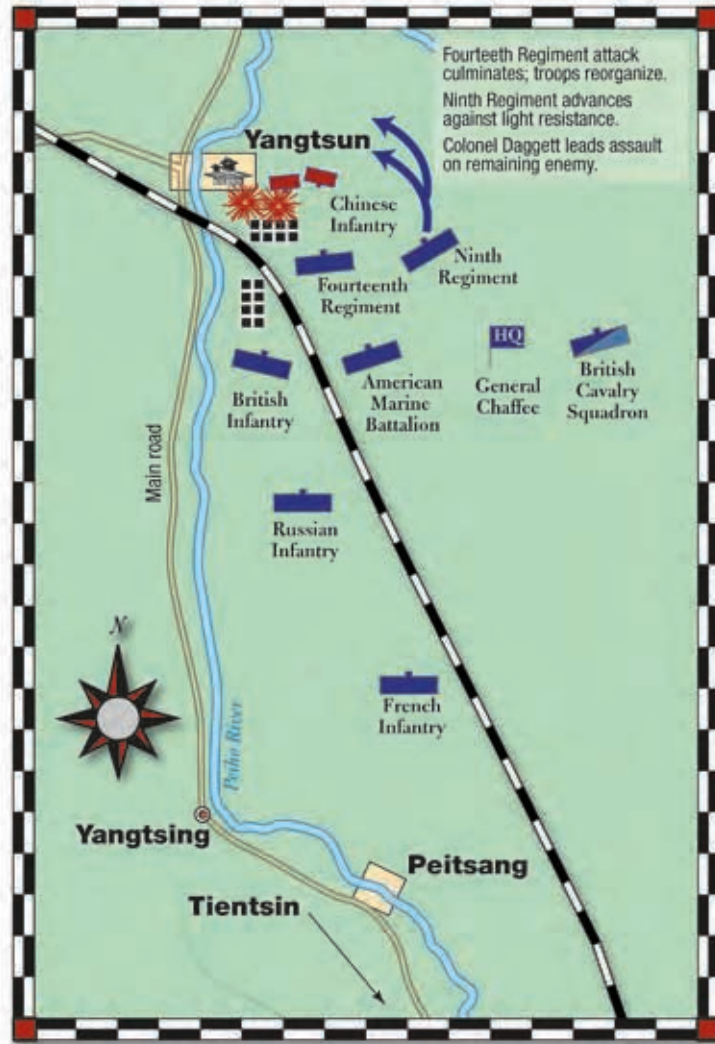
*I am sorry it is my duty to find fault with the noncommissioned officers. They seemed, with few exceptions, to be of but little use in preserving intervals during the advance, and in my attempts to reassemble the battalion they were utterly useless. All the duties of the noncoms had to be performed by the company officers, causing useless and dangerous delay in forming after the engagement.*⁹

7 Colonel Coolidge, 20 August 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 51–52. See also Colonel A. S. Daggett, HQ, Fourteenth Infantry, 19 August 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 43–44.

8 Colonel Daggett, 19 August 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 43–44. See also Lieutenant Colonel A. S. Daggett to the Adjutant General, U.S. Army, Montauk Point, Long Island, 22 August 1898; from the U.S. Army Center of Military History web site, <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/documents/spanam/BSSJH/25Inf3.htm> (accessed 3 October 2007).

9 Captain Frank F. Eastman, Yangtsun, 7 August 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 44–45.

Battle of Yangtsun



3:00 p.m.

Major Quinton's report of the fighting recounted the problem of the converging attack frontage, which in turn caused the intermingling of British and American units. His report praised his commander, Colonel Daggett. Quinton also identified and complimented the commander of the Sikhs, but did not mention the errant artillery fire. The tone of the report suggests that there was no bad blood between Quinton and Daggett, so it seems unlikely that Colonel Daggett's dissatisfaction lay with his own Third Battalion.¹⁰

General Chaffee's take on the battle indicates that both he and Colonel Daggett blamed the British commander for the American casualties in the battle. Chaffee felt that the ground to the west of the railroad embankment was too constricted for the number of troops there, particularly where the railroad and river road converged toward the Yangtsun bridge. He also believed that General Gaselee's urgent call for support was ill-advised and the result of unnecessary panic on the part of his British colleague.¹¹

¹⁰ Major William Quinton, Yangtsun, 7 August 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 47–49.

¹¹ Major General Chaffee's Report on the China Relief Expedition, excerpt from *Five Years of the War Department*; from http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/China.html.

The day's action ended with the Ninth Regiment advancing against light opposition to the north end of Yangtsun and linking up with the Japanese there. The few remaining enemy scattered, leaving the allies with only the intense heat to contend with. The combination of a grueling march, heavy backpacks, and scarcity of water was enough to halt the advancing army. Exhausted, the troops rested, buried their dead, evacuated the wounded by river to Tientsin, and waited for their commanders to decide the next move.

At the Gates

The following day, 7 August, the allied commanders at Yangtsun convened a war council at the Russian headquarters of General Lineivitch. Throughout the campaign the allied officers opted to conduct the operation around a series of planning conferences rather than planning the entire campaign in detail from the start. Tactical coordination, as we have seen, emanated from on-the-spot cooperation, which produced mixed results. Commanders' conferences punctuated the advance to Peking: first at Tientsin and then at Peitsang, Yangtsun, and Tungchow, where the final assault on Peking would be coordinated. The German, Italian, Austrian, and French contingents elected to turn back for Tientsin, but since their numbers were few, the loss of actual combat power was negligible. The rest of the allies—the British, Japanese, Americans, and Russians—were determined to make the trip to Peking as rapidly as possible. The commanders agreed to march upriver to Tungchow, whereupon they would plan the final assault on the capital.

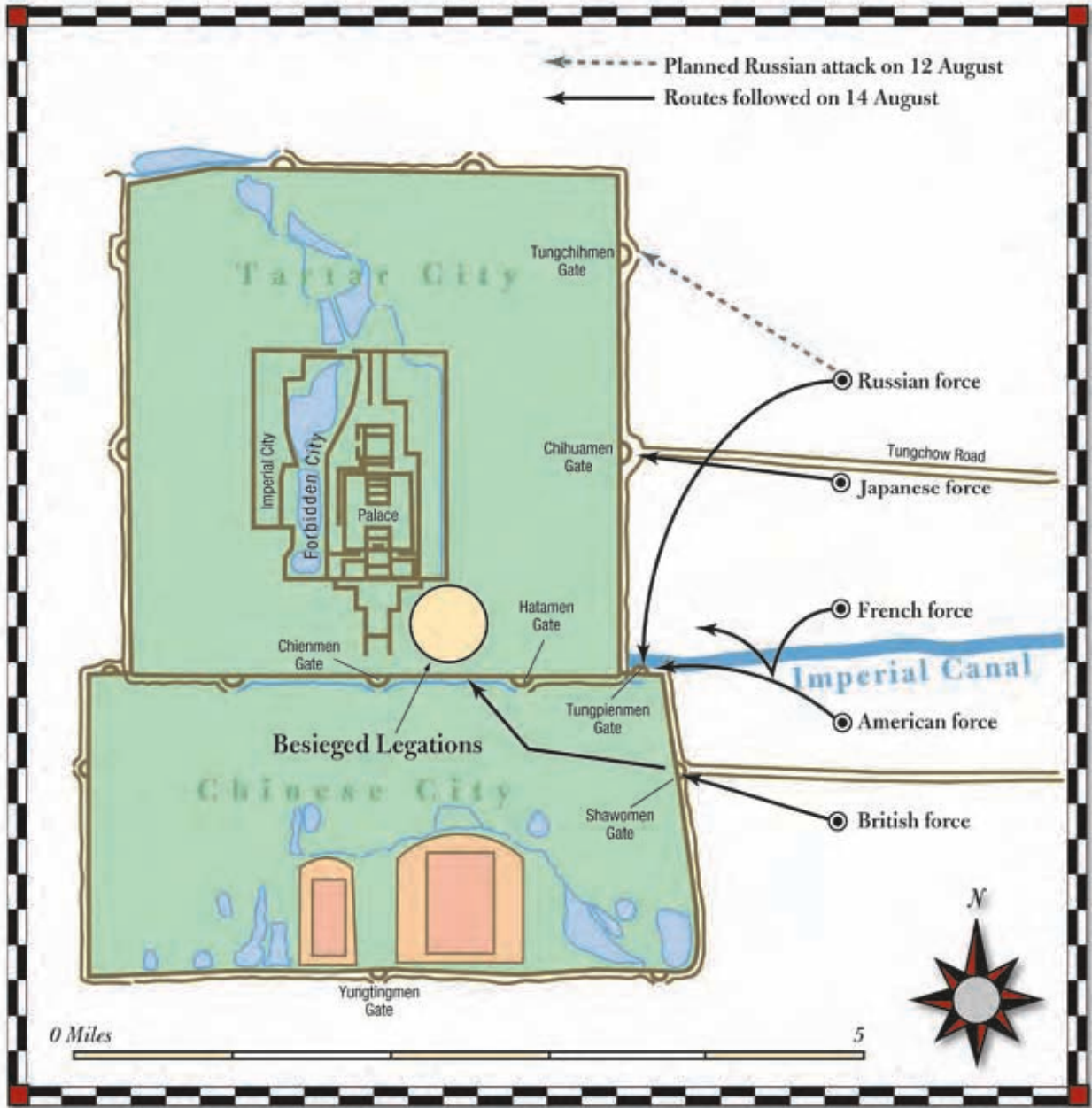
The first move, on 8 August, involved the various armies marshaling in the village of Tsai-Tsun, just north of Yangtsun. For the next five days, the chief enemy was the heat. The armies met only scattered resistance from Chinese Imperial troops, but the route of advance was marked with groups of soldiers from each nation lying exhausted on the roadside as temperatures exceeded 100 degrees. Stragglers were directed to rejoin their units by nightfall each day. The threat of Boxer attacks along the line of communications seemed to have receded because of the strength and determination of the allied attack. It remained for the expedition only to reach the walls of Peking and assault the city.

The advancing polyglot army had a mixed record of behavior as it tramped through village after village. In general, the Americans and British were conciliatory and gentle with the indigenous population, while the other allies' attitudes ranged from dismissive to brutal. Summary executions of anyone sporting the red sash of a Boxer were common, and looting accompanied the seizure of each village and town. Many Chinese citizens bolted at the first sign of the approaching foreigners, and not a few committed suicide rather than take a chance on allied good will.

On the morning of 12 August, Japanese forces reached the walled village of Tungchow and blew down the gate before first light. Once inside, they found that the Chinese had already abandoned the village. Messages passed among the allied commanders, and the various national contingents converged on Tungchow to prepare for the final assault. Fortune finally smiled on the exhausted troops as the weather clouded over, providing some relief from the heat. The commanders met to consider their next move, but the Russian commander, General Lineivitch, insisted that his troops needed a full day to rest before proceeding. The other commanders disagreed, and in the end they reached a compromise: they would use the next day to conduct a systematic reconnaissance of the Peking walls and gates in preparation for the final attack.

The question that weighed heavily remained: would there be anyone left in Peking to rescue? On 8 August, General Gaselee had received a coded message from his countryman

The Relief of Peking



14 August 1900

Sir Claude MacDonald, but there was no guarantee that the Chinese might not try to finish off the foreigners as the relief expedition neared the capital. On 10 August, General Gaselee sent a message stating that the relief column was at long last on the way. Subsequent messages were sneaked into Peking with news that the troops were only days away from the city. Another unknown was how the Imperial Chinese would react to the approach of the allied army. Would they attempt to escalate the attacks to punish the foreigners' insolence and finish off the wretched defenders? The answer, apparently, was yes.

The beginning of August found conditions in Peking worsening rapidly for the people trapped in the legations. The Chinese converts, hunkered down in the Fu, had the worst of it and were eating tree bark, seeds, and an occasional stray cat or dog. The Westerners and Japanese enjoyed a more sophisticated diet of horse meat and whatever tinned rations they could find. Disease was rampant, and the flow of casualties into the makeshift field hospitals never abated. The suffering community had to endure endless vacillation by the Chinese, which added to their sense of distress. Ever since the quasi-truce of mid-July, Imperial officials kept in communication with Sir Claude and the other ministers. They gave vague promises of relief mixed with proclamations of sympathy and good will, but at the same time, the sniping and shouts of "Sha! Sha!" ("Kill! Kill!") continued.

On 13 August, new Imperial troops entered the capital and began to position closer to the legations. Rifle fire intensified, forcing some within to lie prone and immobile for hours. Chinese artillery pounded at the defenses, battering down wall after wall, while the defenders scrambled to reinforce their barricades. As evening fell, the Chinese made their last and strongest effort to break into the legations. Artillery atop the Imperial City Wall pounded the besieged allies until it was silenced by return fire. Fresh Imperial troops launched a determined attack from the Mongol Market on the southwest corner of the British Legation. All around the perimeter violence erupted, and every man capable of holding a weapon raced to shore up the defenses. It looked like the end had finally come.

Suddenly, from the east came the distinctive booming of artillery. The Chinese attacks paused, and both sides fell silent so they could listen to this new development. Soon there could be no doubt what they were hearing: the relief army was pounding at the walls of Peking.

The Final Assault

Following the seizure of Tungchow, the allied commanders convened their final council of war to determine how they would fight their way into Peking. The Russians pushed for a day of rest before continuing but were overruled. Instead, the decision was to conduct a three-phase operation. On 13 August, each nation was to send out armed reconnaissance parties to probe the Chinese defenses around each of the key gates on the eastern side of the city and establish attack positions. The following day, commanders were to bring up their main troops and prepare for the assault. Finally, on 15 August, the allies would conduct a simultaneous assault on the city.

To overtax the defenders while minimizing the risk of fratricide, each national contingent was assigned a separate gate. The Russians were to attack the Tungchihmen Gate at the northeast corner of the city. This would bring them into the Tartar City near the old Russian church and within striking distance of the American Presbyterian church. They could also threaten the Imperial City. The Japanese were assigned the Chihuamen Gate, which would bring them into the center of the Tartar City near the East Cathedral, the London Mission, and the Tsungli Yamen. The Americans were to aim for the Tungpienmen Gate located near the angle where the Chinese City and Tartar City met. This gate was the closest to the Legation Quarter and

might offer the fastest opportunity to rescue the besieged defenders. Finally, the British were to attack the Shawomen Gate, which would bring them into the Chinese City—apart from any chance of support from the other armies. Theirs would be a risky attack, but it might lead to the opportunity to sneak over or through the Tartar Wall directly into the Legation Quarter.

The attack did not go as planned, however. The friction and confusion of coalition operations had existed throughout the campaign, but now a new ingredient would militate against effective teamwork: national ambitions. The imperialist powers that were working together to chastise the Chinese were also natural rivals. As the end of the adventure neared, each foreign detachment worried about ending the war in the most advantageous position possible. Two elements that would determine political leverage after the war would be the size of each nation's military force in Peking and the order in which they entered the city. General Lineivitch, the Russian commanding general, could do nothing to increase the size of his force, but in the middle of the night on 13 August, he decided to try to steal a march on his allies.

Russian reconnaissance discovered that the defenses around the Tungpienmen Gate—originally assigned to the Americans—were light and not prepared for combat. Lineivitch took the initiative and ordered his subordinate, General Vasselievski to probe the gate and secure it. Instead, Vasselievski led a full-scale attack on it, seized the gatehouse, scattered the defenders, and blasted a hole in the gate. The Russians' initiative might have been praiseworthy if, concurrent with their preemptive attack, they had notified the other allies of their intentions. Instead, they appeared to follow baser desires and tried to enter the city by themselves. The other allies learned hours later what had happened, and the effect was to precipitate a headlong rush by the other armies. Unfortunately for the Russians, their attack bogged down almost immediately, and Chinese sharpshooters atop the Tartar Wall pinned them down, bringing their assault to a halt.

Meanwhile, General Gaselee's British soldiers moved as planned on the Shawomen Gate. With a pair of guns, they blasted the defenses and scattered the Chinese. Gaselee's troops poured into the city and advanced rapidly against minimal resistance. As he had anticipated, the general was able to quickly cut a path to the sluice gate, through which the Imperial Canal flowed from the Legation Quarter. In short order, Sikhs and Rajputs (Indian regiments) pushed into the British compound and were the first to be greeted by the grateful defenders. A few hidden Chinese continued to snipe at the legations and the allied relief columns converging there, but most of the Imperial troops, along with government officials and common citizens, were fleeing the city.

The Americans, still ignorant of General Lineivitch's impromptu actions, had advanced to the Tungpienmen Gate and found the Russians pinned down by Chinese fire from the east wall of the Tartar City and the adjoining Fox Tower. General Chaffee noted with disdain that "The Russian artillery and troops were in great confusion in the passage, their artillery facing in both directions, and I could see no effort being made to extricate themselves and give passage into the city."¹² Colonel Daggett, commanding the Fourteenth Regiment, asked for a volunteer to scale the wall overlooking the ruined gate. Bugler Calvin P. Titus, E Company, stepped forward and cried, "I'll try, sir!" The short, wiry man climbed the wall unarmed and found that the enemy had fled. He planted the Stars and Stripes on the wall and signaled his mates; American soldiers

12 Major General Chaffee's Report on the China Relief Expedition, excerpt from *Five Years of the War Department*; from http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/China.html.

were soon swarming up the wall. Titus won the Congressional Medal of Honor for his exploit, along with an appointment to West Point.¹³

Captain Reilly's Light Battery maneuvered through the tight alleys beyond the gate, found a place to unlimber, and began an effective bombardment that helped sweep the Chinese off the walls. After clearing the walls surrounding the gate, the Fourteenth Regiment led a grinding, block-by-block advance through the city toward the legations. Behind them, the Ninth Regiment followed and supported their attack. Convinced that he had enough combat power advancing toward the legations, Chaffee ordered the Marines to secure the trains. Unaware that the British had already reached the objective, the Americans marched triumphantly into the compound. Upset that their comrades had beat them to the punch, they were delighted to find the defenders still alive. General Chaffee confessed to his grateful fellow Americans inside that he feared that the Chinese had already massacred them the night before. The Russians entered the Legation Quarter about an hour after the Americans.

The Japanese contingent had a harder time than the others. Equipped with only light artillery, Yamaguchi's troops pounded at the Chihuaamen Gate all day on 14 August. Their engineers supplemented the barrage with multiple attempts at detonating charges, and some ten to twenty of them were killed by Chinese snipers. They managed to blow the gate finally around 9:00 p.m. and immediately charged into the city, reaching the legations later that night.

In all, the besieged defenders within Peking suffered sixty-six killed and 150 wounded, besides the uncounted dead, wounded, and sick Chinese converts. This latter group underwent unimaginable horrors, both from the attacks of their fellow countrymen and from the racially motivated neglect of their European allies. The Chinese Christian children bore the brunt of the hardship, many of them dying for lack of food or from disease. Like the foreigners, they were profoundly grateful for the arrival of the relief column.

Early the following morning, the Empress Dowager Tsu Hsi and her retinue fled the city, disguised as peasants and in the company of a mixed band of demoralized Imperial troops. By the time the allies thought about approaching the legendary Forbidden City, no one of any authority or responsibility was left there. The allies, ignorant of the court's desperation, contemplated their attack of the Imperial City with dread because they assumed it would be well defended. They were surprised, gratified, but a bit disappointed to find the Empress' troops gone.

General Chaffee, not content to celebrate and sip champagne with the ministers, began to clear out pockets of snipers who were firing from the Imperial City. The operation to breach the defenses there incurred light casualties, but the loss of Captain Reilly was painful for the Americans. Throughout the campaign in China, the dashing artillery officer had maneuvered his Light Battery with great skill and energy. He was standing next to Chaffee directing fire at the enemy gates just before 9:00 a.m. on 15 August when he was struck in the mouth and killed instantly. Waller eulogized Reilly in his official report:

*A braver soldier, a truer friend, never breathed than this admirable and lamented officer. He died by my side, touching me at the moment of the blow. He died without murmur or groan.*¹⁴

Despite this loss, the Americans persisted, using artillery to blast open the gates so that the Fourteenth Regiment could attack. Angered at the lackadaisical performance of his erstwhile

¹³ Titus graduated West Point in 1905 and retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1930.

¹⁴ Major L. W. T. Waller, Peking, 20 August 1900, *Annual Report*, p. 83.

allies, Chaffee was mounting a unilateral American assault on the Imperial City when his fellow commanders insisted on another war council. Reluctantly, the general ordered his troops to withdraw, but the following day, 16 August, the allied commanders agreed to occupy the Imperial City.¹⁵

The city of Peking was secured and quickly put under martial law by the victorious allies. The legations had been saved, much to the surprise of the rest of the world. The government of the Empress Dowager had fled. What remained was the business of recovering from the brief war and deciding on the fate of China.

¹⁵ Major General Chaffee's Report on the China Relief Expedition, excerpt from *Five Years of the War Department*; from http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/China.html.

Post-Combat Operations

The flight of the Imperial Court and much of the population of the city left Peking in the hands of the victorious allies. With the danger of serious combat operations and the catharsis of relieving the legations behind them, the allied armies resorted to the less glorious task of pillaging the city. International rivalries, personal greed, and lax leadership gave rise to a stunning display of murder, rape, and theft over the course of the next few months. While no nation was guiltless of the wholesale looting of Peking, the German contingent earned the most notorious reputation for violence, followed closely by the Russians and French. The civilian ministers and their staffs joined in the fun, some of them amassing huge fortunes built on stolen property.

The pressing issue that the allied governments and their theater commanders had to address was how to end the conflict. To achieve their political, economic, and military goals, they had to ensure the complete defeat of the Boxer movement and simultaneously reach some sort of accommodation with the government of China.

Subsequent Operations

The relief of the legations did not bring a halt to allied operations in China. While the allies awaited the arrival of the commander of the international relief expedition, Field Marshal Alfred von Waldersee, they conducted operations against supposed Boxer strongholds in the vicinity of Peking and Tientsin. On 19 August, Lieutenant Colonel Theodore J. Wint, commander of the Sixth Cavalry stationed in Tientsin, led a reconnaissance against suspected Boxer activity at the request of Brigadier General Dorward, who was in command of the line of communications between the city and Taku. Several miles to the west of Tientsin, the mounted patrol came under fire, initiating an extended firefight that played out through the morning hours. The American tactics consisted of deploying dismounted forces in lines designed to achieve fire superiority over the enemy, to contain the enemy's maneuver, and to attempt to determine the enemy's exact dispositions. The terrain was dominated by cornfields and small ravines that made visibility difficult for both sides. Once the local commanders sensed a slackening in the enemy's fire, they sought permission to finish them off. The skirmish ended with the American cavalry conducting a mounted charge that scattered the enemy. Colonel Wint's force suffered six wounded and claimed that some 300–500 of the enemy were killed out of an estimated 5,000–7,000 engaged.¹ General Chaffee credited this operation with removing a grave threat to Tientsin and the allies' line of communications.

On 3 September, Lieutenant B. B. Hyer, Sixth Cavalry, led a troop of sixty-three men to a village twenty-four miles outside of Peking to secure a delivery of sheep to the capital. Upon reaching the village of Sha-ho, he learned that the Chinese had been unable to bring the animals forward because of the presence of 500 Imperial troops at a nearby village, Chang Ping Chow. Hyer led his men discreetly through the cornfields the next morning, and they were able to surprise and rout the enemy detachment, killing twenty-five and destroying a large cache of weapons. The remaining enemy withdrew to the west.²

1 Lieutenant Colonel Theodore J. Wint, Report of Reconnaissance and Engagement in the Vicinity of Tientsin, China, 19 August 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 98–100.

2 First Lieutenant B. B. Hyer, Report of a Reconnaissance in the Vicinity of Peking, China, 3–6 September 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 108–109.

Similar operations took place throughout September, but they usually involved no more than a few troops, and most resulted in the routing or retreat of the Chinese forces. Both Boxer militia and Imperial troops were still active, but with each subsequent engagement, their determination withered. American casualties remained negligible, and the operations were successful in securing lines of communications and suppressing enemy activity.

One operation during this period, however, did not fare so well. On 17–18 September, Brigadier General James H. Wilson, who had served previously with General Sherman on his march through Georgia and who had arrived in China to serve as Chaffee's second in command, led an operation that captured worldwide attention. Wilson commanded a combined Anglo-American force whose mission was to attack hostile Chinese to the west of Peking in the vicinity of the Hun-Ho River. General Gaselee and Sir Claude MacDonald accompanied the operation, and Brigadier General E. H. Barrow, Gaselee's chief of staff, commanded the British troops under Wilson's overall supervision.

The combined force departed the village of Lu-kou-chiao early on 17 September and marched northward to the base of a mountain to the west of the Pa-ta-chow temples. The White Pagoda, a 1,000-year-old structure, was the most prominent building overlooking the village, which the Boxers were supposedly using as a base. By 6:00 a.m., British and American forces were scaling the cliffs with a view to outflanking the Boxer detachment. According to the Americans' official report, the British had been ordered to continue north and close off the only possible route of retreat, but they failed to do so in time.³ The British reports concluded the opposite: that it was the Americans who were ordered to close off the path of retreat.⁴ A firefight ensued, but before the main American force could close on the objective, the Boxers had escaped northward through the unguarded pass. General Wilson considered the mission to be a success.

With the operation over, Brigadier General Barrow approached Wilson and stated that Sir Claude desired to fire the village and pagodas in retribution for the Boxers' destruction of foreign property in Peking. Wilson refused to have anything to do with what he considered to be wanton violence, and he insisted that no such action would take place under his command. Though the two allies remained cordial, the British allowed the Americans to depart for Peking, whereupon they destroyed the village and pagodas.

When word got out about the destruction of such an old landmark, there was general outrage. Wilson maintained that he had been opposed to it, but it was some time before he was able to get clear of the allegations against him. General Barrow, in turn, protested that it had been at MacDonald's insistence that the structure was destroyed, but he, too, suffered from popular disapproval. The tide of public opinion had swung against such acts of vengeance, and subsequent operations were carried out under increasing constraints.

When Field Marshal Waldersee finally arrived in October, however, he was anxious to justify his presence through continued action. German contingents soon began to conduct operations allegedly aimed at destroying remaining pockets of Boxers in the Peking environs, but by most accounts the majority of those killed and captured were innocent civilians. The German patrols engaged in acts ranging from casual brutality to outright slaughter before the world press finally turned public opinion decidedly against further such conduct. The Americans had been ordered

³ Brigadier General James H. Wilson, Report of an Expedition Against Hostile Chinese in the Vicinity of Hun Ho River, 17–18 September 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 120–123.

⁴ Lieutenant Colonel J. W. Tulloch, Twenty-sixth Baluchistan Rifles, Peking, China, 18 September 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 132–134.

not to participate, largely because of General Chaffee's disapproving reports to Washington. Waldersee was pilloried in the press for his excesses, and the violence eventually subsided.

Post-Combat Operations in Tientsin and Peking

Shortly after the fall of the walled city of Tientsin on 14 July, the allies worked out an agreement to divide the city into four parts to be administered by American, British, French, and Japanese detachments. Not long after, a "Provisional Government of the Chinese City" became the official governing body, and it was superintended by an Anglo-Russian-Japanese military council, eventually including French, German, Italian, and American officers. This arrangement was to administer the entire area from Tientsin to the mouth of the Peiho River for the next two years. The allies initially declared martial law, but by the time the walled city fell, there was little fight left in those citizens who remained. American commanders strove to restore stability in their sector through strong police presence and effective administration. In addition to ensuring obedience from the population, they had to restrain the soldiers themselves. By early August, American commanders in Tientsin were ordered to keep their soldiers out of the walled city, presumably to keep them from looting or abusing the citizens there.⁵

After the seizure of Peking, the allied commanders divided the city into sections to be secured and administered by various national armies. The Americans were assigned the southwest corner of the Chinese City, and General Chaffee put Colonel Daggett and the Fourteenth Infantry in charge of the garrison. The Ninth Regiment maintained positions inside the Imperial City and at the Chienmen Gate. Concurrent with their partitioning of the city, the allies declared martial law.

Subsequent events suggest that there was a dual intent in the division of the city. Certainly there was the need to establish and maintain martial law, but the partitioning also seemed aimed at achieving some sort of equal access to plunder. Each of the allied nations engaged in the looting of Peking with varying degrees of savagery. The character of the Americans' behavior in the city is reflected in the official record of the court-martial of Private Stephen Dwyar, a Marine charged with two counts of rape and several counts of assault—one of the victims was a sickly child who died soon thereafter. Dwyar was found guilty and sentenced to twenty years' confinement at Alcatraz. Although historians generally agree that the British and Americans were the least brutal in their behavior, no nation came away with clean hands.

Chinese citizens who remained in the city found new police regulations issued by the commanders of the allied forces (less France, whose government consistently refused to cooperate with the other coalition members). The gates of the city were to be closed at 7:00 p.m. and opened at 5:00 a.m. The allies enforced a strict curfew after 8:00 p.m. and threatened severe punishment for any who disobeyed. During the day, no more than three Chinese were permitted to gather or walk together in public. All Chinese were required to recognize and obey the military police, who were identified with white bands on their arms. Opium dens and gambling houses were closed, and native Chinese citizens were not permitted to have firearms.⁶

In the aftermath of the taking of Peking, the allies hunted down every trace of Boxer presence they could find. Terrified Chinese citizens—some former Boxers, some not—spared no energy trying to convince the conquerors of their loyalty, but the allies nevertheless oversaw the

5 Circular, HQ China Relief Expedition, Tientsin, China, 3 August 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 26–29.

6 "Police Regulations Issued by the Commanders of the Allied Forces (less France)," Committee for the Management of the City of Peking, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 395, Entry 919.

executions of hundreds of suspected enemies. Chinese executioners most often did the deed, but throughout August, summary executions at the hands of allied soldiers were not uncommon.

Still, by mid-September, General Chaffee was determined to put a stop to any looting or indiscriminate violence on the part of his soldiers. On 12 September, he issued a general order designed to confine Americans on garrison to their own sector of Peking and to prevent unnecessary violence against Chinese citizenry. His instructions served as a sort of “rules of engagement” (ROE), similar to modern military practice. Among other things, the rules stipulated that:

*All detachments of troops from this command sent outside of the walls... of Peking... will be placed under charge of an officer or sergeant... Stringent orders will be issued by all officers and noncommissioned officers on duty on the line of communications prohibiting firing by enlisted men, except in case of personal danger... It is made the duty of all officers to arrest soldiers found violating this order... The sections of the city occupied will be divided into precincts under efficient subchiefs, supported by an efficient guard to preserve order and protect property, public and private... Seizure of products of the soil and farm or other property by individuals, soldiers, or detachments without due compensation on the spot is... strictly forbidden.*⁷

On 12 October 1900, the Committee for the Management of the City of Peking conducted its first official meeting. Attendees included Major General Freiherr von Gayl and Major von Brixen for Germany, Lieutenant Colonel Shiba for Japan, Captain Selwyn for Great Britain, Captain Dodds for the United States, and Captain Ferigo for Italy. The tone of international cooperation in committee proceedings revealed growing conflict among some coalition members. The committee decided that official communications would be in German. They noted that France would not participate in their proceedings, and that the Russians would be “confined to their own legation district” and “would not be consulted in any decision concerning the management of the city government.”⁸

The committee organized a series of special subcommittees designed to administer the city. The British and Japanese took on “common safety, discipline and labor, police, announcements and jurisprudence.” The Germans and Americans collaborated on “general preservation of health, protection against epidemics, cleaning of and lighting of streets, latrines, assignation houses, hospitals, native and foreign physicians.” Japan and Italy were to be in charge of “subsistence of the people, medical treatment of the poor, public kitchens, distribution of rice as well as the sale thereof, exhibition of price lists, and requirements of coal.” The Americans and British were assigned “management of finances, customs, [and] money used in management of the city.” Finally, Italy and Germany were in charge of “[a] map of the city, passes, requests, and complaints.” The committee’s work points to the coalition’s determination to thoroughly administer a city in which most public services had been disrupted.⁹

Committee members and the military officials who dealt with them were concerned about the equitable and effective management of key resources—especially salt, coal, coal oil, and

7 General Order No. 17, HQ China Relief Expedition, Peking, China, 12 September 1900, *Annual Report*, pp. 92–93.

8 Minutes, Committee for the Management of the City of Peking, 12 October 1900, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 395, Entry 919.

9 Minutes, Committee for the Management of the City of Peking, 12 October 1900, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 395, Entry 919.

rice. The Boxer crisis and the flight of the Imperial Court had left the city without adequate sustenance from the surrounding countryside. Allied officers worked hard to restore the flow of supplies to sustain both their own forces and the Chinese citizens of Peking. Often, these efforts led to squabbles. At one point, General Chaffee wrote a polite but firm letter to his German counterpart stating that the large amount of coal acquired by his forces prior to turning over part of their sector to the Germans would remain in American hands and that the Germans had no right to it.¹⁰

In January 1901, the committee met to develop rules for the handling of criminal cases in Peking. They elected to dispense with any sort of international court and instead allowed each nation to conduct legal affairs in their own districts of the city. They recommended, however, that a Chinese lawyer be present for all proceedings. Military commanders would retain the right to veto or approve death penalties, which would pertain to involvement in the Boxer movement, attacks on foreigners, murder, attempted murder, robbery, counterfeiting, plundering, burglary, and rape. Convicted Chinese were to be held in a Chinese prison located in the American sector and guarded by Chinese under foreign supervision—the entire operation was paid for by the city of Peking. The committee went on to declare that no Chinese police may arrest a foreigner.¹¹

The rules were harsh, but the committee was also interested in restoring a normal life for the Chinese citizenry. Along with collecting taxes to defray the expense of street cleaning and lighting, the members insisted that no foreigners were permitted to confiscate Chinese property. “The only way to regain the confidence of the people is to assure them of non-interference in the execution of their daily labor. It is also to the interest of all to have eatables as well as coal brought in in large quantities from outside the city.” The committee also specified that there would be no more tearing down houses for firewood.¹²

The imposition of martial law on Tientsin and Peking in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion could in no way be deemed equitable. The behavior of the international contingents at times violated what little international law existed at the time. The bigotry and high-handedness of the conquerors frequently brutalized the hapless Chinese and made little distinction between those who had been guilty of violence against foreigners and those who had not. But the firmness of the military rule did produce some benefits. It effectively quelled any further Boxer violence, and for the average citizen, life gradually improved. Markets reopened, and the economy began to pick up. Once commanders got their own troops in line, violence against innocent citizens diminished. The techniques were questionable, but the allied occupation forces did achieve conditions that led to the eventual withdrawal of foreign armies and restoration of the Imperial government.

The Boxer Protocol and Beyond

Treaty negotiations began slowly. The first tentative meetings between the allies and the Chinese began in December 1900 but accomplished little at first. The dynamics of the diplomatic exchanges had less to do with the Chinese position than with the conflicting agendas of the victorious allies. Each nation wanted retribution for those Chinese officials who had allied themselves with the Boxers, but they also desired varying amounts of monetary compensation

10 Letter, Major General Chaffee to Commanding General, German Forces in Peking, 2 September 1900, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 395, Entry 898.

11 Minutes, Committee for the Management of the City of Peking, 5 January 1901, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 395, Entry 919.

12 Minutes, Committee for the Management of the City of Peking, 5 January 1901, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 395, Entry 919.

and land concessions. It took a little over a year for the final treaty to be signed. The official title of the document was “Austria-Hungary, Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Russia, Spain, United States and China—Final Protocol for the Settlement of the Disturbances of 1900,” but it became more generally known simply as “The Boxer Protocol.”

Compensation was fixed at 450 million taels (about 350 million U.S. gold dollars) to be paid over thirty-nine years. The figure derived from a simple calculation: one tael for each of the estimated population of 450 million Chinese. Of that sum, Russia would collect the lion’s share, a little more than 28%, followed by Germany with 20%, France with 16%, Great Britain with 11%, Japan with 8%, the United States and Italy with 7% each, and the remaining smaller portions going to Belgium, Austria-Hungary, The Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, and Norway. The Americans eventually decided to use their portion to fund the education of foreign students.

To preclude any further violence, the allies insisted on a two-year ban on weapons imports, and all anti-foreign societies were declared illegal. The Taku forts were destroyed, and the allies were to be permitted the right to station garrisons in Peking and Tientsin. Foreign diplomatic missions were to have exclusive use of the Legation Quarter, and no Chinese were to be allowed to live there. The insult to Chinese sovereignty was obvious and equally inescapable.

Numerous minor officials bore the brunt of reprisals, including approximately 100 executions, but the real culprits—those closest to the top—for the most part escaped punishment. Prince Tuan was exiled to Turkestan. The treaty also required the government of China to apologize for the murders of Baron von Ketteler and Japanese Minister Sugiyama. Meanwhile, von Ketteler’s killer had been found, arrested, and decapitated on the very spot of the murder some time before.

In some sense, the Qing Dynasty triumphed: it was allowed to remain in power, and no Chinese territory was lost. Tsu Hsi and the Imperial Court returned to Peking in January 1902. The allies’ forbearance emanated not from any altruism or sense of fair play, but rather from the simple fact that no alternative government was judged feasible. The Empress Dowager was compelled to step down and stay out of government permanently, but the Manchus themselves would continue to rule. In the wake of the Boxer crisis, however, real power gravitated from the central government to the provincial governors. The weakening of the Qing grip on power continued until their final overthrow in 1912, when China declared herself a republic.

Previous efforts at reform and modernization had been aborted by the Empress Dowager, but the trauma of the allies’ victory reinvigorated the drive toward progress. The anachronistic Confucian examination system was gradually replaced with an education system built along the lines of Western universities. Progress was slow, but it had at least begun.

The Boxer Rebellion of 1900 and the subsequent international China Relief Expedition were small-scale affairs compared with the wars and crises leading up to the conflagration of 1914. But an examination of America’s “first time out” performance in coalition operations reveals problems that persisted for generations. Lack of adequate staffing, shortfalls in education, and deficient language skills continued to characterize coalition operations throughout the twentieth century. Serious reform of American joint warfare capabilities and organization had to wait almost fifty years for the National Security Act of 1947, which combined the Navy Department with the Department of War and created the Air Force as a separate service. In 1986, the Department of Defense Reorganization Act, popularly known as the Goldwater-Nichols Act, established a unified chain of command, created requirements for officer education and joint assignments, and subordinated the Service Chiefs to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs

of Staff. In effect, Congress mandated the development of well-integrated joint operations. In 1900, joint cooperation remained a matter of personal negotiation and inter-service politics. That the Army and Navy worked together effectively is a testimony to the character of the soldiers, sailors, and marines involved.

The China Relief Expedition was a remarkable model of coalition expeditionary warfare, both for its triumphs and failures. Despite conflicting agendas and contradictory orders from their respective governments, the allied commanders achieved a high degree of cooperation. A shared outrage toward Chinese provocations, as well as the immediate danger presented by uncounted Boxer mobs and Imperial forces, overcame both language barriers and mutual suspicions. American company and field-grade officers proved to be innovative and energetic in the absence of clear orders. Their dauntless determination and professional pride were admirable, but they did not substitute for deficiencies in basic tactics. Like all land armies of the period, the American Army and Marine Corps were struggling to reform their tactics to accommodate the dramatic increase in lethality that came with modern weaponry. The Boxer Rebellion experience helped to push doctrine toward a more open order for infantry maneuver, but many more lives would have to be wasted on the battlefields of World War I before the officer corps abandoned completely the smoothbore musket tactics of the past.

Two world wars and the Cold War served to rivet the attention of American military officials on big wars. From 1918 through 1989, military training, equipment, and organization were aimed at winning the next world war: first in Europe and then throughout the world. The post-Cold War world and the rise of international terrorism have served to remind us that throughout our history, smaller-scale expeditionary warfare has remained an important expression of our global grand strategy. Careful study of the first war in which the United States partnered with foreign military forces against a vicious threat reveals the foundation of American joint, coalition warfare. In the summer of 1900, American military officers found themselves 6,000 miles from home in the midst of a foreign culture facing both regular and irregular enemies. With few forces, limited understanding of the situation, and a loose coalition of the willing, the China Relief Expedition prevailed.

八國聯軍

義和團



A Japanese officer cleans his sword after the ritual decapitation of Boxer spies. European troops preferred firing parties to this Samurai method.

Then and Now:

A Comparison of Post-Combat Operations—The Boxer Rebellion and Operation Iraqi Freedom

Post-combat operations in China in the summer of 1900 took on a very different character from what we observe today in Iraq. A comparison of the two operations is instructive if only because the outcomes produced were diametric opposites. At the heart of the contrast are the different ideologies that motivated the two military interventions. The late nineteenth century saw the emergence of “Social Darwinism,” a sociological spin-off of Charles Darwin’s work in natural history. Although Darwin himself advocated beneficence toward all races, others used his theories on natural selection to suggest that the white races, with their obvious advantages in technology, economics, and political organization, were superior to other races and should therefore dominate them. The operation in China brought to light the savage and brutal dimensions of Social Darwinism, targeting the hapless Chinese citizenry, who were often dismissed as subhuman. The perpetrators of the violence against the innocent citizens of Peking and its environs believed that the Chinese, like animals, did not feel pain as much as white people did.¹

The natural inclination toward bigotry during the Boxer Rebellion was accentuated by other factors as well. First, of course, was the provocation—both real and imagined—that the foreigners felt they had suffered at the hands of the Boxers and the Manchu government. Second, the uprising saw a clash of civilizations—occidental and oriental—with the Japanese aligned with the Western powers. Many foreigners found Chinese culture and religion strange, barbaric, and occasionally repugnant. The Chinese and their Manchu rulers reciprocated, considering the foreigners to be cultural inferiors, despite their advantages in economics and military might. When the passions of war set flame to this tinder, the resulting conflagration consumed those unlucky enough to fall into the hands of the adversary.

Religion played a major role during the intervention as well—sometimes for the good but more often not. Opposing religious beliefs lay at the heart of the conflict to begin with. Christian missionaries from the Western powers had ridden the coattails of the military and economic inroads attained, with the result that Western theology and culture were penetrating to every corner of China. Wherever the missionaries went, they confronted the Buddhist, Confucian, and supernatural beliefs of the people they ministered to. The implications went far beyond philosophy or religion, however, because missionaries became local power brokers wherever they went. They had access to Western technology and medicine, and they were not shy about denigrating anything they thought was pagan or primitive. Any Chinese that converted to the foreign religion enjoyed the missionaries’ special protection and advocacy. As a result, many Chinese, as well as their Manchu rulers, hated Christians in general and missionaries in particular.

The atrocities suffered by the missionaries and their converts in the six months leading up to the summer of 1900 polarized the feelings of the Westerners, too. Evidence of the massacres of Chinese converts and those missionaries not lucky enough to escape the violence convinced

1 Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China’s War on Foreigners That Shook the World in the Summer of 1900* (New York: Berkley Books, 2000), p. 286.

the horrified readers in foreign capitals that the Boxers and their cohorts were animals worthy of slaughter. Christian concern for lost souls mingled with a taste for righteous vengeance against God's enemies, and, in the crucible of passionate conflict, violence won out over restraint.

The end result was that the allied armies brutalized the Chinese population throughout the crisis and for a month or so after. Living under this harsh reality, the Chinese citizenry for the most part adapted in order to survive. In short, they obeyed their foreign masters and avoided any hint of opposition to them. The obsequiousness of the occupied population in turn led to the eventual relaxation of martial law and the reestablishment of Chinese local authority. Before long, shops were opening, and the impulsive violence of the allies began to recede. Within a year of the conflict, the majority of military forces had been withdrawn, and only garrisons remained.

The contrast with operations in Iraq from 2003 to 2008 is remarkable. Social Darwinism and the “white man's burden” have been replaced with modern democratic liberalism and its ideological partner, respect for human rights. The armies in China in 1900 had the Hague Convention of 1899 to guide them, although the rules were easily discarded in practice. But the American Army and the allies in Iraq had the Geneva-Hague Conventions and the United Nations Charter, along with a ubiquitous media presence, to help ensure scrutiny of the soldiers in action. Allied forces went into battle with clear and compelling ROE designed to protect noncombatants and prisoners of war. The high-profile instances of failure—Haditha, Abu Ghraib, and others—are remarkable for their scarcity. Counterinsurgency has always been the most severe test of soldier self-restraint. The conditions imposed on American and allied forces, particularly in the Sunni Triangle, create enormous psychological pressure on soldiers. Were it not for strong leadership and the scrutiny of modern media presence, atrocities would likely have become the rule rather than the exception.

The uncomfortable question that rises when comparing the two operations is whether modern liberal ideology produces more or less violence against noncombatants. The severe actions taken by allied armies in Peking in 1900 were by all accounts illegal, immoral, and heinous. But within a month or so, the violence largely subsided, and law and order resumed. The population—the “water” in which the “fish” swim, according to Maoist insurgency theory—became compliant and fearful of provocation. The prospect of insurgent action against the foreign conquerors was anathema because disproportionate reprisal would result. The world community, although not insensitive to atrocities, was not organized or inclined to take significant action to restrain their respective soldiers. Thus, while the means were odious, the large-scale societal effects led to peace, resolution of the war, and the rapid departure of the occupying force.

Warfare is fraught with irony and with the interaction of opposites. It is a matter of record that enemy insurgents in Iraq are well acquainted with American ROE and deliberately structure their tactics to exploit them. Because the ROE seek to protect noncombatants from exposure to battlefield fires, the insurgents operate in such a manner as to put those noncombatants in harm's way. Thus, the very rules that are meant to protect citizens in fact operate to endanger them in some instances.

In a larger sense, some critics of the Iraq operation have noted that the subject population was never made to “feel defeat.” The inadequate force levels set by the Bush administration left the American commanders in Iraq with insufficient troops to impose martial law and control looting and other criminal activity. After a brief period of societal shock following the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, the conspicuous absence of occupation troops throughout the most

dangerous areas of Iraq led to a vacuum of power that a nascent insurgency eventually filled. Far from feeling defeated, most citizens felt confused, bewildered, and betrayed by the American-led invasion. A population that might have eventually fallen in line with the American goals of law and order and democratic reform instead wavered and became vulnerable to the insurgents' strong-arm tactics. Far from becoming obsequious and compliant, the average Iraqi became skeptical and contemptuous—and willing to risk violence against the Americans.²

The question remains: how can an occupying force create widespread compliance in the defeated population without violating the laws of war or the beneficent ideologies from which they spring? The dominant theory of many critics is that if the Americans had gone into Iraq with adequate troop levels and declared martial law in the aftermath of the defeat of Hussein's forces, they could have squashed any initial insurgency and restored law and order quickly. This theory, if popular, remains unproven. Greater numbers of troops would still have been constrained by the same ROE, and clever opponents would likely have used those ROE against the occupying forces.

A comparison of operations in 1900 and 2003 thus leaves us with a perplexing conclusion. We have progressed beyond the ideologies and social context that led to the heinous pillaging of Peking in 1900, but we have not completed the transition by solving the operational implications of democratic liberalism in war. We don't want the indiscriminate killing, rape, looting, and destruction that history recorded at the end of the Boxer Rebellion, but we do want the subsequent law and order that they birthed. It remains to be seen whether the irony can be solved in twenty-first century warfare.

² See, for example, Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), pp. 149–202.

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