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That memorable campaign: American experiences in the China Relief Expedition during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion

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THAT MEMORABLE CAMPAIGN:
AMERICAN EXPERIENCES IN THE CHINA RELIEF EXPEDITION
DURING THE 1900 BOXER REBELLION

A Thesis

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Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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by
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ABSTRACT

At the time of the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900, the American army was not experienced in dealing with challenges abroad. The Army spent the last quarter of the nineteenth century fighting the Indian Wars in the West and a generation of officers grew to maturity commanding small frontier posts where only a few had the opportunity to maneuver large formations during the Spanish-American War. The infantrymen who marched into Peking in August of 1900 were transitioning between the tactics of the past and the future. The Napoleonic formations used in the American Civil War, already made obsolete at that time by the lethal firepower available, still lingered in the collective memory as the preferred method of maneuvering large bodies of troops and bringing firepower to bear.

The Americans who participated in the Boxer Relief Expedition demonstrated impressive adaptability and flexibility. They assembled a sizeable force in China from a scattered military, occupied with fighting an insurgency in the Philippines and garrison duties in the United States. General Chaffee worked within a loosely organized coalition of allied armies in order to rescue the besieged legations in Peking.

It is ironic that the Boxer Rebellion, and the international coalition mounted to combat it, was doomed to slip into near obscurity, overshadowed by the military conflagration to come a decade and a half later. The American role in the China Relief Expedition foretold events that would occur in the next major war in the twentieth century, the Great War.

CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS OF THE REBELLION AND INITIAL AMERICAN RESPONSE

European investment and economic exploitation in China at the end of the nineteenth century created widespread discontent amongst the peasantry, especially in the northeast. The weak government was not able to control the spreading anti-foreign sentiment and prevent outbreaks of violence against anything foreign, especially missionaries. The United States joined other European powers and Japan in reacting quickly to the crisis and deployed troops to China.

China, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was a pale shadow of its former self. European nations and Japan had inflicted a series of humiliating military defeats on the ancient kingdom throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century. The foreign powers forced commercial treaties on China that guaranteed access to its raw materials and markets. In the city of Tientsin, the Chinese government granted the British and French “concessions.” Foreign political and commercial interests made their home in these urban districts outside the walled Native City. In the capital, Peking, the foreigners established legations, in a corner of the old Tartar City, an area traditionally reserved for government ministries and high-ranking members of the bureaucracy. The Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi, a former concubine and inveterate schemer who held rigid anti-Western views, ruled as regent in the name of the emperor, Pu Yi. A nascent peasant movement that would later develop into the Boxers threatened the authority of rural administrators. Threats to stability from inside and outside the country forced the Imperial government to maintain a delicate balance between competing powers.¹

¹ Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion*, pp. 17-21.

The treaties that forced open the Chinese hinterland to foreign business interests, and the railroads that Europeans constructed to transport manufactured goods into the interior and raw materials to coastal ports, allowed the previously isolated Chinese peasantry to encounter outsiders in great numbers for the first time. Foreign economic development replaced many Chinese workers through industrialization and upset the labor market. Christian missionaries came in for especially scornful treatment because they tended to establish themselves in remote regions, where the people had no extensive experience with foreigners and were susceptible to easy misconceptions. The missionaries and their Christian congregations adopted Western attitudes toward private property that the unconverted interpreted as the “appropriation of public property.”² A severe drought, lasting two years, contributed to the dislocation of native labor and increased the superstitious peasants’ suspicions of foreign influence. The people blamed the missionaries and Christianity for disruptions to the local economy because they were the closest representatives of the invasive foreign influence.³

The Boxer movement began in the provinces of Chih-li and Shantung as a peasant reaction against disruptive economic change within the interior. The Boxers first appeared as martial-arts instructors who met in the markets and public places in villages to give instruction. The training in martial arts was a metaphor for peasant empowerment and the Chinese name for the movement, “Yi He Tuan,” translated literally as “Corps of

² Unidentified gentry member (Dingxian) account, n.d. (1900), quoted in Hu Sheng, *From the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement*, p. 205. This account is from a 1951 Chinese anthology of source material relating to the Yi He Tuan (Boxer) movement.

³ Charles Davis Jameson (Hwai King, China) account, n.d. (June 1900), in Frederic A. Sharf and Peter Harrington, *China 1900: The Eyewitnesses Speak*, p. 32. Hereafter referred to as Jameson Account. Jameson was an American mining engineer working in China for a British company during the Boxer Rebellion.

Harmonious Fists.” The European missionaries referred to them simply as “Boxers.”⁴ Adherents adopted a uniform consisting of a red turban, scarf or sash, and gaiters. Each member bore a yellow card, said to make him invulnerable to injury, with the saying “Long live the Manchu Dynasty; down with the foreign devils.” The Boxers carried swords, knives, and spears and often would “spring up into the air, execute a sort of war dance, and then drop to the ground.” They demonstrated to their peasant audiences their claim to invulnerability from bullets by firing weapons loaded only with powder at each other. This supernatural response to the foreign influence found a fertile following amongst the dissatisfied peasantry and allowed the movement to grow quickly.⁵

Chinese mandarins, cognizant of the threat to internal stability that the Boxers represented, disagreed on how to deal with the rapidly growing organization. Some officials favored co-opting them into the governmental security structure while others sought to have them suppressed. The local governors quickly identified the Boxers’ potential for creating a violent conflict with the foreign businesses and missionaries. In 1889, the governor of Shantung warned the Empress Dowager of “unexpected and unfortunate incidents” that “would give foreigners excuses to make trouble for us” and recommended that the government integrate the Boxer “militias” into existing security forces.⁶ The magistrate of Pingyuan, on the other hand, advocated suppression of the Boxers. “They have nothing but evil at their [sic] hearts and gather together only to oppose the government,” he complained. The Boxers enjoyed support from members of

⁴ Hu Sheng, *Opium War*, pp. 192-96.

⁵ Lieutenant Paul Schlieper (Peking) diary entry, 9 June 1900, in *China 1900*, p. 48. Hereafter referred to as Schlieper Diary. Schlieper was a German naval officer wounded during the Seymour Expedition who published his diary as a tribute to Admiral Seymour.

⁶ Zhang Rumei (Shandong) letter to Empress Tzu Hsi, n.d. (February 1899), quoted in *Opium War*, p. 199.

the upper class, he pointedly noted, implying that the Imperial government should not treat them as an obscure peasant movement.⁷

The Empress Dowager recognized that her political and military power was not strong enough to withstand a conflict with the Boxers or the foreigners, so she attempted to placate both sides, playing for time. Anticipating violent incidents, she counseled her mandarins not “to show prejudice for or against this side or the other.”⁸ On November 21, 1899, she issued a secret edict espousing the opposite point of view. “Let each strive to preserve from destruction and spoliation at the ruthless hands of the invader his ancestral home and graves. Let these our words be made known to each and all within our domain.” Events soon proved her forecasts of imminent conflict accurate.⁹

The foreign legations in Peking represented a broad assortment of nationalities and professions, living in an insular community inside the Tartar Wall. They were at the center of foreign activity within China, although sparse communications with the interior limited their ability to monitor current events. In December 1899, the first news from missionaries of an anti-foreign peasant movement spreading through Shantung province northwards into Chih-li reached the American minister to the Chinese Court, Edwin Conger. Missionaries asked Conger, a Civil War veteran and former congressman with political contacts reaching up to President McKinley, to petition the Chinese government on their behalf for better protection from potential anti-foreign activities.¹⁰ Conger and his foreign colleagues initially saw the missionaries’ pleas for help as an exaggeration,

⁷ Lao Naixuan (Wuqiao) letter to Empress Tzu Hsi, n.d. (1899), *ibid.*

⁸ Empress Dowager (Peking) letter to Yuxian, n.d. (November 1899), quoted in *ibid.*, p. 203.

⁹ Empress Dowager (Peking) secret edict, 21 November 1899, in Peter Harrington, *Peking 1900: The Boxer Rebellion*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Preston, p. 33.

since no news of any anti-foreign incidents had reached the foreign legations in Peking from the Chinese court or European businessmen in the interior.¹¹

The Chinese administration continued to maintain a policy of non-interference. On January 11, 1900, the Empress Dowager issued an edict attempting to discriminate between legitimate civic organizations formed for the common defense and “worthless vagabonds.” She went on to state that failure to differentiate between the two groups was the fault of local administrators.¹² The threat to government control and near inevitability of conflict with the foreigners prompted Yu Lu, viceroy of Chih-li, to issue a proclamation two months later, this one outlawing clandestine societies and public martial arts training. Frustration continued to grow within the Chinese bureaucracy and by May the Imperial Court clearly realized that it was unable to eradicate the Boxers or co-opt them into the existing civic structure. The movement had now become an uprising.¹³

Anti-foreign incidents of the type predicted by the Empress Dowager in her edict six months earlier began to increase in frequency and intensity throughout May. The Boxers attacked anything reflecting non-Chinese influence, not bothering to discriminate between foreigners and natives who were involved with them. Missionaries and their converts were the closest and easiest targets. Charles Jameson, an American engineer employed by a British mining company, described being in one village where 600

¹¹ Jameson Account, p. 23.

¹² Empress Dowager (Peking) edict, 11 January 1900, quoted in Peter Fleming, *The Siege at Peking*, pp. 52-53.

¹³ Yu Lu (Chih-li) proclamation, n.d. (March 1900), quoted in *Opium War*, pp. 206-08.

Christian refugees were taking shelter in a Catholic mission compound after the Boxers seized 60 men, women, and children and threw them into a fire.¹⁴

An increasing number of eyewitness accounts relating Boxer atrocities alarmed the foreign residents. Although their concern over the insurrection and its potential threat to foreign life and property was increasing, the legation ministers still viewed the disturbances as isolated events, limited to the peasantry in the provinces. The ministers held a consolidated meeting at the Spanish legation on May 27, 1900, and drafted a petition to the Imperial Government requesting a decree against the Boxers.¹⁵ Reassured by the Imperial government, Conger confidently reported to Washington that the uprising would be contained within western China and would not affect Peking.¹⁶

During the last week in May and beginning of June, the Boxers briefly seized control in Zhouzhou, a railway town southwest of Peking. Their integration within the civilian population was so complete by this time that local administrators reporting to the imperial court could only estimate Boxer strengths as being between 2,000 and 30,000. The legation ministers again petitioned the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the Tsungli-Yamen, for information about the Boxers and guarantees for the safety of foreigners. Impressed by the growing potential of another conflict with foreigners that China could not win, the Empress Dowager cautioned her Grand Councilor and commander of Imperial Troops around the capital that he “should by no means be reckless” toward foreigners and “under no circumstances pressure them so hard as to create unnecessary incidents.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Jameson Account, p. 38.

¹⁵ Ione Woodward (Peking) letter to Morgan S. Woodward, 28 May 1900, in *China 1900*, p. 37. Hereafter referred to as Woodward Letter. Miss Woodward was a guest of Conger when she wrote this letter to her father.

¹⁶ Jameson Account, p. 24.

¹⁷ Empress Dowager (Peking) letter to Ronglu, 3 June 1900, quoted in *Opium War*, p. 210.

The Boxers grew in strength and gained converts within Peking itself even as Tzu Hsi sent her edict cautioning restraint. On May 28, a Boxer contingent occupied an abandoned temple outside the city walls, known as the Chaoqing Convent, for four days and “practiced martial arts with knives and swords.” Nine days later, officials saw a company of Boxer militia, a hundred strong, leaving the city. Blacksmith shops outside the city walls were “working day and night to make more and more knives.”¹⁸ Outside of the capital city, Boxer mobs burned the railroad bridge near Tientsin. Despite all this activity, Peking was a large city, able to absorb a considerable amount of isolated mob violence and the legations did not yet worry about their own safety.¹⁹

Part of this confidence in their security was a result of recent military reinforcements. On May 31, an ad hoc conglomeration of marines and naval infantry, representing various foreign governments and drawn from ships lying at anchor off the Taku Bar, reached the legations to augment the small security force there already.²⁰ In response to anxious inquiries from a British mining concern in the interior, the British legation was reassuring. “Legation guards arrived yesterday,” it telegraphed on June 1. “All quiet here. You can proceed with your work. Will notify you if there is any trouble.”²¹

The situation, however, changed rapidly over the next few days as Boxer activity within Peking grew to threatening proportions and it became apparent that the Imperial Government did not have either the power or the desire to suppress the insurrection. A squad of American marines, therefore, evacuated the American Methodist Mission,

¹⁸ Official Report (Peking) to Tzu Hsi, 8 June 1900, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 212.

¹⁹ Woodward Letter, p. 37.

²⁰ Major E. W. M. Norie, *Official Account of the Military Operations in China 1900-1901*, p. 8. Norie was the Assistant Quartermaster-General for Intelligence on the British staff in China.

²¹ Jameson Account, p. 27.

located within the Tartar City about a half-mile from the legation compounds, and escorted the missionaries and their converts to shelter inside the British legation. The legations began preparing for a protracted defense, erecting barricades in the streets, and clearing fields of fire around their buildings.²² Fearing that all communication with the outside world would soon be cut off, as the Boxers had started burning railway stations and destroying telegraph lines on June 9, Sir Claude MacDonald, the British minister, sent an alarming telegram to Admiral Seymour, commanding the British naval squadron off the Taku Bar. “Situation extremely grave,” MacDonald said. “Unless arrangements are made for immediate advance to Peking it will be too late” -implying that all foreign residents in Peking faced imminent massacre. That MacDonald, a respected leader not known to exaggerate danger, would seek rescue indicated to all outside Peking that the very survival of the legations and foreign community in that city was in doubt. Seymour acted quickly. “I am landing at once with all available men, and have asked foreign officers’ co-operation,” he telegraphed the admiralty the next day. While Seymour prepared to launch the hasty attempt to break through to the legations, other allied forces, seized the Taku Forts. MacDonald’s telegram of June 9 thus had helped to transform what loomed as a humanitarian rescue mission into war with China itself.²³

Three days later, news of Seymour’s Expedition reached Peking, causing “tumult in the city” and forcing the Chinese government to face the choice of war with the foreigners or civil conflict.²⁴ Violence and the threat of violence against the legations

²² Private Oscar Upham (Peking) diary entry, 10 June 1900, in *China 1900*, p. 155. Hereafter referred to as Upham Diary. Upham was one of the American marines who reinforced Peking and fought in the legation quarter throughout the siege.

²³ Vice-Admiral Sir E. Seymour (Tongku) telegram to Admiralty, 10 June 1900, in Tim Coates, ed., *The Siege of the Peking Embassy, 1900: Sir Claude MacDonald’s Report on the Boxer Rebellion*, p. 26.

²⁴ Schlieper Diary, p. 50.

were increasing by the day. On June 13, German marines killed ten Boxers from the top of the Tartar wall adjacent to the German legation. The shootings prompted a large crowd to gather at the Ha-ta men Gate on the east side of the legation compound and demand access to the Tartar City. Fearing an attack by the inflamed crowd if the Chinese guards should open the gate, a squad of American marines took control of the gatehouse to prevent the mob's entry.²⁵

The civil unrest spread throughout the Chinese City the next day.²⁶ Boxers set fire to any native stores they found selling foreign goods and smoke from burning buildings west of the Chien-men Gate filled the sky. Within the legations, a full-scale effort was underway to fortify the buildings and prepare for the assaults that now seemed inevitable. The legation compounds were concentrated in the southeast corner of the Tartar City. The British Legation was not only the largest, but the stone wall surrounding it provided a natural defense. It faced across a dry drainage canal to Prince Fu's Palace, known to western residents as the "Fu." The majority of European refugees took shelter within the British compound, although the residents worked feverishly to turn every building within the perimeter into a redoubt.²⁷

To the southwest of the British buildings were the Russian and American legations and to the southeast the Spanish, Japanese, French, and German. The American and German buildings abutted the Tartar Wall, a crucial piece of urban terrain that dominated the entire foreign quarter and overlooked the Chinese City on the other side.

²⁵ Upham Diary, p. 155.

²⁶ The Tartar City contained the important governmental agencies, commercial interests, and Imperial City, while the Chinese City had the majority of the population. The Chinese and Tartar Cities shared a wall on the north and south sides, respectively.

²⁷ Upham Diary, p. 156.

The effort to gather all foreigners and Christians into the legation compound took on the characteristics of a combat operation more than simple crowd control. A party of ten American marines and twenty Russians rescued 300 Chinese Christians from the Nan Tong (South) Church, killing fifty Boxers in the process. A mixed party of American, British, and Japanese killed another fifty-eight threatening the Russian legation, while a mob burned the Methodist chapel before U.S. Marines drove them off.²⁸

By June 15, the Chinese government could no longer deny the threat to its own interests, as well as Western residents and property, caused by a conflict spiraling rapidly out of control. It therefore issued a decree instructing its security forces to “crack down and crack down hard.” Unfortunately for the Imperial Court, the political schizophrenia that had gripped it since the Boxers first proved their movement to be more than an isolated disturbance ended too late. The decree failed to convince any of the legation ministers that the government was serious about suppressing the Boxers or to stop the military operations against China.²⁹

The United States faced two difficult issues during the initial stages of the Boxer Rebellion. The War Department had to identify available military forces and transport them to the region with an adequate command and control structure. Simultaneously, the U.S. government had to develop a policy for the conduct of those forces in order to limit the mission to rescuing the legations and not attacking China itself. Minister Conger’s frantic pleas for help with the emergency in Tientsin and Peking, which were under increasingly intense Boxer attacks, lent urgency to the deployment. The Navy led the initial U.S. presence in the region when warships located throughout the western Pacific

²⁸ Ibid, p. 156.

²⁹ Emperor Qing (Peking) letter to Imperial Court, 15 June 1900, quoted in *Opium War*, p. 212.

converged on the Taku Bar and joined the international fleet at anchor. The Army, conducting anti-guerilla operations in the Philippines, spread throughout frontier garrisons in the Western United States, and dependent on the Navy for movement to China, took longer to arrive. American soldiers were not present in significant numbers to participate in the initial defense of Peking and Tientsin, or in Seymour's Expedition. The few marines available on ships in the Pacific fleet assumed that role. Managing the global flow of materiel and equipment to China, while scant and often erroneous information was coming from the intended destination, forced the War Department to improvise transportation and a command structure.

Shortly after midday on May 26, 1900, the cruiser *Newark* became the first American ship to arrive off the Taku Bar, a sandbar defining the point nearest the mouth of the Pei-ho River and the Taku forts that guarded it that deep-draft ships could approach. She carried Rear Admiral Louis Kempff, Commander of the United States Naval Force, Asiatic Squadron, and joined two Chinese cruisers and a French cruiser at anchor fifteen miles off the coast. Kempff immediately began to gather information on the situation, consulting with the American consul and senior military leaders of other foreign powers on the next day.³⁰

Kempff also ordered American forces ashore, although the reports at hand indicated that thus far there had been but "slight" damage to American citizens and property. At 4:30 a.m. on May 29, he received a telegram from Conger in Peking urging him to send troops immediately to Tientsin. The admiral responded with what forces he had available. That same day a provisional unit consisting of fifty-six marines, seventy-five sailors, and a doctor left the ship for Peking under the command of Captain B. H.

³⁰ Upham Diary, p. 153.

McCalla, USN. With him were two Marine captains, Newton Hall and John T. Meyers, both of whom would play critical roles during the fighting in Peking to come. The small American contingent set out with a three-inch field piece in the *Newark*'s boats. Fifty-six of their number, mostly marines, moved by rail to Peking on May 31 and McCalla returned to Tientsin two days later to act as a liaison between Peking and the fleet and receive American troops as they arrived in theater.³¹ There was a feeling of impending crisis in the air and five days later Kempff sent another fifty sailors to McCalla, giving him about a hundred men in Tientsin, and asked the War Department for more. He also requested the Navy Department to send him the gunboat *Helena*, a shallow-draft vessel that could cross the Taku Bar and navigate on the Pei-ho River.³²

Kempff's pleas for reinforcements set off a debate within American policy making circles as to what the specific mission of an American expeditionary force should be. While few could argue with the need to protect American lives and property, there was extreme reluctance to enter into a war with China, especially with forces committed in the Philippines. Rear Admiral George C. Remey, the senior U.S. naval officer in the Pacific and currently in Manila, was convinced that Kempff was "cooperating with foreign powers to an extent incompatible with interests of the American Government." He sent a cablegram to the Secretary of the Navy arguing that "affairs in the Philippines are considered paramount" and he had instructed Kempff to commit only those troops necessary for the "protection of American interests." Remey's communications in the Philippines were more cumbersome than those in China, however, and by the time he

³¹ Daggett, pp. 11-12.

³² Kempff (Taku) telegram to Navy Secretary Long, n.d. (received 4 June 1900), in United States, U.S. Army Center of Military History, *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition, April 15, 1898 to July 30, 1902*, pp. 409-410. Hereafter cited as USACMH, *Correspondence*.

sent the cable, Kempff already had committed McCalla and his men to Peking and Tientsin.³³

Despite Remy's misgivings, the War Department continued to dispatch reinforcements to the region, while the Navy Department worked a delicate choreography of shipping schedules and load plans to bring every available marine to Kempff's assistance. A broken propeller shaft stranded *Helena* in the Philippines, so the Navy Department sent the gunboat *Monocacy*, a wooden paddle-wheel steamer built in 1863, in its place,³⁴ and ordered the transport *Solace*, carrying one hundred marines, diverted to Taku. The Navy was careful to keep the response to the crisis measured, fearing that if senior officers in the Philippines saw China as a greater priority than their own area of operation, they would deploy their commands to Taku. On June 9 the Department specifically instructed Remy not to permit the withdrawal of any additional ships from the Philippines.³⁵

Kempff recognized that the nature of the crisis had changed once the allies attacked the Taku forts. The difficulties encountered by Seymour's Expedition as it fought its way back to Tientsin and the heavy firing there, which Kempff could hear from the Taku Bar, strengthened his opinion that the allied force currently on the ground was wholly inadequate to the task. When Navy Secretary John D. Long cabled on June 15 wanting information, Kempff replied that 300 American troops were ashore, split between Seymour's Expedition and the Tientsin defense, 430 foreign troops were defending the legations in Peking, and a total of 3,000 foreign troops had just arrived to

³³ Remy (Manila) telegram to Long, n.d. (received 6 June 1900), USACMH, *Correspondence*, p. 410.

³⁴ Peter Harrington, *Peking 1900: The Boxer Rebellion*, p. 44.

³⁵ Navy Department (Washington, D.C.) telegram to Remy, 9 June 1900, USACMH, *Correspondence*, p. 411.

augment the 2,000 present. The forces available to the Allies were insufficient, Kempff cautioned, and he recommended that the United States provide at least a brigade, composed of an infantry regiment with supporting arms.³⁶

Kempff maintained a delicate balancing act between following the guidance from his superiors and maintaining a significant role in the Allied effort, ensuring an American voice in the collective decision-making. He kept American troops from participating in the attacks on the Taku Forts, but allowed the *Monocacy* to shell them because he could use the excuse that the gunboat had been crossing the Pei-ho when the fighting began. In fact, he saw little hope of staying out of a general conflict and told the War Department so on June 22. Allied forces, he reported, had issued a proclamation to the Chinese saying that “they intend to use armed force only against the Boxers and those people who oppose them in the march to Peking for the rescue of their fellow countrymen.” Because the Allies had attacked Chinese forces when they seized the Taku Forts, the term “those people who oppose them” applied to Chinese Army units as much as it did the Boxers. If there had been any doubt in Washington about the nature of American involvement in a war on the Chinese mainland, this proclamation dispelled it.³⁷

Communication from the growing international forces in Peking, Tientsin, and the Taku Bar was problematic throughout the mobilization phase. During the initial stages of the fighting, telegraph lines were serviceable and available. Once the fighting increased around Tientsin, these lines were cut and the Navy had to establish a system of carrying dispatches down the Pei-ho River to the port city of Tongku, then relaying them to Chefoo in North China, where they went out by cable to Washington. Though functional,

³⁶ Kempff (Chefoo, China) telegram to Secretary of the Navy, n.d. (received 20 June 1900), USACMH, *Correspondence*, p. 415.

³⁷ Kempff (Chefoo) telegram to Secretary of the Navy, n.d. (received 23 June 1900), *ibid.*, p. 416.

the system was tenuous: dispatches had to leave Tongku at 6:00 a.m. to reach Chefoo at 4:00 p.m. After insurgents severed the telegraph line, some sporadic communication with Peking remained, mainly through runners who slipped through Boxer lines. Frequently questions posed by the War Department in Washington went unanswered and status reports composed by commanders in the field went undelivered. Distance and enemy interference were the main causes of the communication breakdown, but administrative mishaps were responsible as well. On June 20, for example, Consul John D. Fowler discovered a stack of telegrams sitting unopened in Chefoo and forwarded them to Kempff, Remey, and the War Department.³⁸

On June 22, Adjutant General of the Army Henry C. Corbin, assuming that the Ninth Regiment was on its way to China from the Philippines as he had ordered the week before, asked MacArthur if he could provide an additional regiment. MacArthur replied the next day, presumably to Corbin's surprise, that a storm had delayed the Ninth Infantry's departure for five days. Corbin replied in a terse message to begin movement of the regiment immediately. MacArthur, still recalcitrant, replied that losing an entire regiment would mean that the counter-insurgency effort in the Philippines would be effectively on hold at a time when he considered success imminent. Ignoring his protests, Corbin again instructed him to get the Ninth underway immediately. True to MacArthur's previous report, the Ninth Infantry sailed on June 27, at 8:30 a.m. from the Philippines with thirty-nine officers, four medical orderlies, and 1,271 men.³⁹

MacArthur's unwillingness to relinquish forces from the Philippines underscored the need to resolve the problem of command and control for the growing force in China.

³⁸ Fowler (Chefoo) telegram to Secretary of State, n.d. (received 20 June 1900), *ibid.*, p. 414.

³⁹ MacArthur (Manila) telegram to Corbin, n.d. (received 28 June 1900), *ibid.*, p. 419.

Any military operations conducted in conjunction with, allied troops needed an American officer with equivalent rank to maintain influence, while the growing hodge-podge of American units would require a single commander to direct operations in the interior of China. Corbin found his man in Brigadier General Adna Chaffee, who received orders on June 26 to proceed from Washington, D.C. to Peking to assume command of all American troops there. At the same time Corbin instructed MacArthur to add a signal corps detachment to the Ninth Infantry to provide communications support for Chaffee.⁴⁰

MacArthur, seeing the importance of his command fading in the Philippines and greater opportunity for distinguishing himself, made a bid for overall command of forces in China. In a double-edged cable to Washington, he said he would cooperate with the Secretary of War “with as much perfection and energy as though I believed in the wisdom of such a policy.” He then asked for assignment in China to take command. In a follow-up message, MacArthur proposed a new plan for rerouting the Pacific shipping that would include having Chaffee’s transport diverted directly to Manila. Implicit in this recommendation was the suggestion that Chaffee receive temporary command of American forces in the Philippines while MacArthur himself proceeded to Taku to take control of forces in China.⁴¹ This was the final straw for Corbin. In a cable the tone of which bordered on insulting, he told MacArthur that he was not in charge of the China Relief Expedition or anywhere in the chain of command. All troops dispatched to China from the Philippines were no longer under MacArthur’s control, Corbin declared. In a

⁴⁰ Corbin (Washington, D.C.) telegram to Chaffee, 26 June 1900, *ibid.*, p. 418.

⁴¹ MacArthur (Manila) telegram to Corbin, n.d. (received 18 July 1900), *ibid.*, p. 429.

final broadside, to ensure that MacArthur understood, Corbin informed him that he would stay in the Philippines.⁴²

The fighting at Tientsin had crystallized further the nature of the campaign to come and on July 19, Corbin sent Chaffee detailed orders. The China Relief Expedition, as Washington now called Chaffee's command, should ultimately consist of 10,000 troops, Corbin informed him. Manila was to be the principle staging base with Nagasaki a secondary depot and coaling station. It was important that Chaffee, now promoted to the rank of Major General of Volunteers, cooperate with the senior American naval officer in Taku and maintain good relations with Chinese non-combatants, as well as with Li Hung Chang, Viceroy of Chih-li, whom Washington now considered the legitimate Chinese authority. Although Chaffee would work with allies, said Corbin, he would remain independent.⁴³ In a simultaneous message intended to prevent confusion, Long cabled Remy with instructions to "cooperate fully" with Chaffee.⁴⁴

The Boxer Rebellion began with a series of fundamental misunderstandings. The peasantry blamed the foreigners for their economic problems, the Imperial administrators and the legations thought the Chinese government was strong enough to guarantee the foreigners' safety, and the Americans thought they could conduct a limited military operation to safeguard their citizens. The mob rule that gripped Peking in June and subsequent Allied attacks against the Chinese Army would broaden the conflict and force every participant to rethink its basic assumptions about the rebellion.

⁴² Corbin (Washington, D.C.) telegram to MacArthur, 20 July 1900, *ibid.*, p. 433.

⁴³ Corbin (Washington, D.C.) telegram to Chaffee, 19 July 1900, *ibid.*, pp. 431-32.

⁴⁴ Long (Washington, D.C.) telegram to Remy, 19 July 1900, *ibid.*, p. 432.

CHAPTER 2

TAKU, PEKING AND THE SEYMOUR EXPEDITION

During the night of June 14, 1900, a council of international naval commanders met aboard the *H.M.S. Barfleur* to discuss a new crisis developing at the mouth of the Pei-ho, one that would change the nature of the entire campaign. Allied contingents ashore reported that Chinese troops seized all of the rolling stock at the Tongku railway station north in order to bring down forces in strength to occupy the Taku Forts. A hostile force at the mouth of the Pei-ho was an intolerable prospect for the Allies because it would mean that the river and the railway, the only lines of communication to Tientsin and Peking beyond, would be in jeopardy. The council decided to issue orders to the gunboats on the river to prevent the removal of rolling stock and stop the reinforcement of Tongku by the Chinese Army, using force if necessary. This was the first time the Allies deliberately had decided to engage Chinese troops in addition to the Boxers and it escalated the violence directed against the foreigners in Tientsin and Peking.¹

Admiral Kempff, acting under instructions from Washington, was the lone dissenting member of the council. The Allies were at peace with China, he declared, and attacking its army or forts would be an act of war in which he could not participate unless authorized to do so by his government. This view, dictated to Kempff by his superiors, ignored the stark reality of the situation and the threat to troops onshore or any future campaign should the Chinese occupy the forts in strength. However, Washington still preferred to view the conflict as one involving an armed uprising, distinct from the Chinese government.²

¹ Major E. W. M. Norie, *Official Account of the Military Operations in China, 1900-1901*, p. 12.

² Brigadier General A.S. Daggett, *America in the China Relief Expedition*, p. 15.

Shallow draft vessels moving up the Pei-ho River from the Gulf of Pechili first had to pass under the guns of a network of forts guarding the outlet. Beyond the fortifications was the village of Taku on the south bank and further upstream, the village of Tongku with its vitally important railway station, the terminus of the line that led through Tientsin to Peking. The northern bank had two forts connected by a raised causeway. The larger of the two sat adjacent to the mouth of the river, known as the North Fort. The other fort on the north bank, known as the Northwest Fort, sat nearly astride the Pei-ho's first meander to the south. The south bank of the Pei-ho had three redoubts. The largest of the fortifications, known as the South Fort, dominated the southern mouth of the river's outlet. It had a fortified battery position to its south, the Strand Battery, facing out into the gulf, and a fortlet referred to as the Southwest Fort further inland, incapable of interdicting river traffic, but capable of defending against a southern land assault from the sea. The ground between the forts was flat with vast marshy stretches dried in places by the summer sun, impassable by wagons, but posing little hindrance to troops on foot. All of the heavy artillery in the forts faced seaward, leaving it vulnerable to a land attack.

The Allies made the final decision to attack the forts when the Chinese started mining the shipping channel beyond the mouth of the Pei-ho on the night of June 15. Armed with this alarming information, a military council met on the *Rossia* and concluded that hostile forces in the forts, Chinese Army or Boxer, were intolerable and the Allied fleet should assume a defensive posture. The Allies agreed that a force of 300

Japanese marines would move immediately to Tongku Station to secure it against Chinese reinforcement.³

The next morning a second council convened aboard the *Rossia*. The assembled Allied officers concluded that there could be no other reason for the mining of the channel than to block movement up the river and quickly determined they must seize control of the forts. The allies sent an ultimatum to the Viceroy of Chih-li at Tientsin and the commander of the Taku forts to surrender the forts no later than 2:00 a.m. on June 17 or they would assault and occupy them. Admiral Kempff maintained his opposition to American participation, but did agree to allow craft on the Pei-ho take part, reasoning that they would be defending themselves in the event of a Chinese response to the Allied attack. Thus, the only American contribution to the attack was to be the gunboat *Monocacy*, an old paddle-wheel steamer with a draft shallow enough to operate on the river.⁴

The Allies' ground assault plan called for an attack on the forts from the west where the batteries, oriented out to sea, would be inconsequential. Gunboats arrayed themselves up and down the Pei-ho, moving into position to shell the forts. The plan called for the bombardment to begin at 4:00 a.m., two hours after the ultimatum. The allies would first attack the Northwest fort and then move in sequence to the North fort and then the southern ones on the right bank of the river. Some Allied troops landed in the afternoon, augmenting the Japanese who had been the first at Tongku; by midnight, only the British remained on their ships.⁵

³ Captain M. Nagamine official report, n.d. (June 1900), in Frederic A. Sharf and Peter Harrington, *China 1900; The Eyewitnesses Speak*, p. 95. Nagamine was a Japanese officer who commanded the *Naniwa*.

⁴ Norie, *Official Account*, p. 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The Chinese preempted the attack, opening up with cannon at 12:50 a.m. on June 17. The allied gunboats returned fire and the British immediately landed their force. Once ashore, Commander C. Craddock, an officer from the *H.M.S. Alacrity*, took command of the entire expedition, numbering nearly 1,000 British, Germans, Japanese, Russians, Italians, and Austrians. The forts and gunboats traded artillery salvos until 2:45 a.m., when the allied ships began shelling the southern forts to prepare for the ground assault. The allies directed the first deliberate attack of the campaign against the Northwest Fort, and the action became a headlong rush between contingents to be the first over the wall. The British and the Japanese, having the largest forces, were the two leaders, and both assaulted the fort's bastions simultaneously. After a brief fight the Chinese fled and the allies were able to direct the attack on the North Fort while they turned the one remaining operable Chinese gun in the Northwest Fort against the South Fort.⁶

As daylight was breaking, the gunboats moved closer to the South Fort in order to obtain a better position to fire from and suffered the worst of the damage they were to incur in the fight from the still active southern batteries. A fortuitous shot into a Chinese ammunition dump at 6:55 a.m. raised a fireball into the sky, illuminating the landscape as far away as Tientsin. This dramatic explosion signaled the end of Chinese resistance and fifteen minutes later, the ships ceased fire as the infantry moved forward to occupy the southern forts without resistance.⁷

The mouth of the Pei-ho and Tongku station were firmly in allied hands at 8:00 a.m. and the lines of communication to Tientsin, and Peking beyond, were secure. The

⁶ Ibid, p. 13.

⁷ Ibid, p. 15.

price for this tactical victory, however, was substantial. The vacillation of the Imperial court between the Boxers and the foreigners now ended. No longer was the campaign one against an upstart movement of peasant bandits. The Allies were at war with China.⁸

The allied assault on the Taku forts went unnoticed initially by the legation defenders in Peking, but the effects on their precarious existence were profound. On June 19, the Tsungli-Yamen issued instructions to the ministers that they must leave the legations by no later than 4:00 p.m. on the next day. It was impossible for the ministers to comply, not only because of the logistical difficulty of supporting a column of 800 legation residents and 3,000 native Chinese Christians, but because the increasing violence over the past two days made clear what would happen should they leave the shelter of the legations.⁹ The day before, a messenger had notified the ministers that the Boxers would assault with 80,000 men in five days if the legations remained.¹⁰ The next day, the day of the ultimatum, Boxer mobs burned shops, telegraph offices, and “anything foreign” throughout the Chinese city.”¹¹ The ministers “wisely declined” to leave Peking and instead saw to their defenses, trusting in the anticipated Allied rescue. In the hope of buying time, they delivered no response to the Chinese ultimatum, but asked only for further consultations.¹²

⁸ Taussig (Chefoo) telegram to Secretary of the Navy, n.d. (received 17 June 1900) in United States, U.S. Army Center of Military History, *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition: April 15, 1898, to July 30, 1902, Volume 1*, p. 412. Hereafter referred to as USACMH, *Correspondence*.

⁹ Conger (Peking) to Fowler, n.d. (June 1900), quoted in telegram from Fowler (Chefoo) to Corbin, 10 August 1900, *ibid.*, p. 451.

¹⁰ Private Oscar Upham (Peking) diary, 18 June 1900, in Sharf and Harrington, *China 1900*, p. 156. Hereafter referred to as Upham Diary.

¹¹ Mary E. Andrews (Peking) letter to her sister, 20 June 1900, in *China 1900*, p. 174. Andrews was a missionary who spent the entire siege in Peking with the American legation. Hereafter referred to as Andrew’s Account.

¹² Daggett, *America*, p. 16.

The German minister, Baron Von Kettler, decided on June 20 to visit the Tsungli-Yamen and present his views to the mandarins. Against his colleagues' advice, he set out on his own with only his Chinese secretary and some servants as an escort. Halfway to the Tsungli-Yamen an imperial soldier shot him, killing him instantly, and then shot his secretary, who, despite severe wounds, managed to return to the legation compound to spread word of Kettler's assassination. After a hasty conference, the ministers ordered all foreigners outside the legations to take shelter inside the compound and by 2:00 p.m., most had complied. Two hours later, precisely on the deadline for the foreigners' departure, Chinese imperial troops, under the overall command of General Tung Fuhsiang, opened fire on the legations. The siege had begun.¹³

The Chinese government's position toward the legations took an ominous turn on June 23 when the Empress Dowager issued a decree urging speedy elimination of their resistance "so that troops can be spared and sent to Tientsin for defense." By this time, Seymour's Expedition was in retreat to Tientsin and the Chinese government saw the opportunity to deal a serious blow to the foreigners. The next battlefield was clearly going to be at Tientsin, and based on the Seymour's poor performance, the Chinese stood a chance of winning decisively. The legations were a temporary annoyance, keeping troops committed in Peking who could be useful in the fighting to the southeast.¹⁴

Chinese soldiers and Boxers that same day attacked in force from the west, concentrating on the buildings that composed the Russo-Chinese Bank adjacent to the American legation. Chinese rifle fire from the Tartar wall, supplemented by a three-inch field piece, destroyed the bank buildings and forced the Russian officials who occupied

¹³ Upham Diary, p. 156.

¹⁴ Empress Dowager (Peking) decree to the Imperial Council, 23 June 1900, quoted in Peter Fleming, *The Siege at Peking*, p. 121.

homes nearby to retreat to the British legation for shelter. Hoping to burn the foreigners out, the Boxers also set several fires on the west side of the legations, where targets included the Peking library with its valuable collection of ancient scrolls and manuscripts.¹⁵

The next day the Chinese attacked shortly after dawn. They moved down the broad avenue of Legation Street with their three-inch gun in support and advanced as close as fifty feet from the barricade across the street in front of the American legation and hoisted their banner. Alarmed by the ferocious determination of the Chinese infantrymen, Minister Conger ordered all civilians to retreat to the British legation. Unaware of the enemy's retreat, the Chinese did not force their assault into the buildings, which later allowed the Americans to reoccupy them.¹⁶

Chinese troops advanced along the Tartar wall as well as on the street below. A German sortie on the east side along the wall drove them back to the Chien-men Gate in the east, while American troops cleared the street. Twice, Americans led by Captain Meyers counterattacked along the wall to the west. At the end of the day, the legations held, and the line of defense did not change, but the importance of maintaining control of the wall was clear to Minister Conger and the American defenders.¹⁷

The critical value of the Tartar Wall did not escape the Chinese and at 8:00 a.m. on June 25, they started the most intense attacks to date with shelling directed against the American marines on the wall. After two hours of withering fire, Italian soldiers moved an eleven-pound field gun and two gunners up on the wall to reinforce the American position. Chinese riflemen quickly wounded both of the brave Italian gunners and the

¹⁵ Andrews Account, p. 176.

¹⁶ Upham Diary, p. 158.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 157.

American marines were unable to continue working the gun because of the intense enemy fire. The success of their three-inch field piece apparent, the Chinese added a second one and the two-gun battery forced Captain Hall to order his Colts gun down from the wall. Seeing the Americans apparently falling back, the Chinese attacked in force along the wall and on Legation Street. Worried that his meager defense force faced imminent defeat, the weary Hall ordered his men down from the wall. Conger and Captain Meyers emerged from a building and appraised the situation with a cooler eye, then ordered the marines to reoccupy the barricade on the wall immediately. For the second time the Chinese did not press their attack and the Americans were able to reoccupy their position. The Chinese built a barricade on the wall a hundred yards from the Americans and attempted in vain to burn them out. The fighting continued after dark as Chinese riflemen kept up a constant harassing fire on the legations.¹⁸

The continuous action, day and night, wore down the defenders on the wall. On July 1, Chinese artillery fire drove the Germans off the east side of the wall and into the German legation with three wounded. The Americans had not come down from their barricade since ordered back up by Conger five days before. Fearing now that he was between two advancing columns with no allies to protect his rear, Meyers decided to withdraw his marines from the wall. But British Royal Marines led a counterattack to the east to reestablish the barricade formerly held by the Germans, which made the American position tenable again. Enemy fire wounded two of the Royal Marines, but they were able to reestablish the barricade and the Americans stayed on the wall. That evening,

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 159.

Captain Hall ventured up to the small defensive position to relieve Meyers, who retired to the legation for the first time since June 25.¹⁹

Enemy troops used the cover of darkness to advance their barricade to within sixty feet of the American one. The two sides were so close at one point that the Chinese were able to throw stones at the Americans. Early in the morning on July 3, Meyers sent word down from the wall that the Chinese had built a tower opposite the American barricade, threatening its existence. There was no choice for the Americans but to mount a desperate counterattack. After a fusillade of fire, a mixed party of Americans, British, and Russians, led by Meyers, leapt the American barricade and charged the Chinese. Their sudden assault caught the enemy by surprise and the Allies killed sixty, throwing their bodies over the wall before retiring. The Chinese responded to the successful allied attack by bringing a field gun to within thirty yards of the American position, but after two misfires they gave up and continued their sniping.²⁰

Elsewhere in the legations, a Chinese servant had found an old three-inch smoothbore cannon. American marines rigged it up on an Italian mount for a one-pound gun and firing converted Russian ammunition, used it to suppress Chinese fire from the Electric Light Plant. Aptly nicknamed the “international,” the gun served the Japanese in their defense of the Fu and quickly became a popular symbol of the Allies’ cooperation.²¹

The tense and deadly fighting at close quarters had ended the Boxers’ mythical claim to invulnerability and they had passed their zenith as an effective fighting force. In an edict on July 7, the Empress Dowager made clear to the army that the only hope of victory lay with it. The Boxers, she noted scornfully, had claimed that “they were

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 160.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 160-61.

²¹ Ibid., p. 161-62.

invulnerable to guns and swords,” but now “they retreat and make no advance.” It was the Imperial troops, she said, who were showing the necessary aggressiveness and who would bring victory over the foreigners. Her goading had the desired effect and the legations soon faced the worst of the attacks.²²

Meanwhile, Admiral Sir Edward Seymour led the first attempt to relieve the besieged legations in Peking. Seymour made the initial decision to commit military forces to a rescue attempt, regardless of the level of Allied preparation, when MacDonald’s telegram arrived on the evening of June 9, 1900. Delay seemingly meant a massacre in Peking, so Seymour quickly convened a council of war, attended by all consuls and senior naval officers in Tientsin. The assembled group decided that however unprepared they might be for extended military operations, it was necessary to dispatch a relief column the next day.²³

The allies had little intelligence about the enemy forces between Tientsin and the capital. The column, bereft of the cavalry that was still in route to Tongku on ocean-going transports, would have to depend on audacity and speed. The Boxers, though fierce, appeared disorganized, and the Chinese army was still in the throes of indecision, not knowing whom to attack. The quickest way to Peking was by train and Seymour did not have any information that would have led him to believe that the Boxers had irreparably damaged the railroad. Even if the sabotage were excessive, Allied troops could carry repair material with them. The plan, therefore, was simple – load the rolling stock with all available troops and repair materials for the railroad and proceed to Peking.

²² Empress Tsu-Hsi (Peking) edict to Imperial Court, 7 July 1900, quoted in Fleming, *Siege at Peking*, p. 166.

²³ Commander Gitaro Mori (Tientsin) journal, 9 June 1900, in Sharf and Harrington, *China 1900*, p. 73. Mori was staff officer in the Japanese contingent. Hereafter referred to as Mori Journal.

At 10:00 a.m. on June 10, the first trainload of troops, under the direct command of Admiral Seymour, left Tientsin. The contingent consisted of British, Austrians, Italians, and 110 Americans under Captain McCalla. Some of the men were new arrivals to China. Five hundred Royal Navy sailors had come ashore at Tongku in small boats at 3:30 a.m. that morning, took the train to Tientsin, and by 8:00 a.m. were at the station prepared to load the cars.²⁴ A second train followed half an hour after the first with 500 Allied troops aboard. A planned third train with 450 Germans and English gun crews did not leave Tientsin that day.²⁵ A burned railway bridge halted the lead train one mile past Yangtsun. After work crews repaired the bridge, the train was able to continue to the station at Lofa, which British seamen from the *Endymion* had secured. Boxer raiding parties sabotaged the track after the first train passed and the second train halted three miles beyond Yangtsun, short of Lofa.²⁶

The next day, the trains moved forward at an achingly slow pace. A scouting party of British marines marched ahead of the lead train on foot and found heavy damage just beyond Lofa. They also fought their first engagement with the Boxers, killing thirty-five.²⁷ The third train made it to Lofa, reuniting with the stopped first two and bringing the total strength of the expedition to 2,054.²⁸ The German troops renamed the station Fort Endymion in honor of the British sailors whom they relieved in its defense. The three trains moved past Lofa until further Boxer attacks, the most intense to date, forced

²⁴ Flag Lieutenant Frederick A. Powlett (Tientsin) letter to Beatrice Jackson, 27 June 1900, *ibid.*, p. 82. Powlett served as Flag Lieutenant to Seymour on the *H.M.S. Centurion* during the Boxer Rebellion. Hereafter referred to as Powlett Letter.

²⁵ Captain Edward H. Bayly (Tientsin) journal, 10 June 1900, *ibid.*, p. 102. Seymour put Bayly in charge of residents in the British Concession at Tientsin. Bayly later received the Order of Commander of the Bath for his service during the Boxer Rebellion. Hereafter referred to as Bayly Journal.

²⁶ Mori Journal, p. 74.

²⁷ Powlett Letter, p. 83.

²⁸ Mori Journal, p. 74.

them to a halt at 6:00 p.m. They reached the next depot on June 12, at Langfang, only to find their pervasive enemy had destroyed the station before their arrival. Seymour assigned a company of seamen from the *Gefion* to fortify the site and, following the precedent set at Lofa, the Germans dubbed it Fort Gefion. On June 13, the expedition made no progress as Seymour directed all manpower toward guard and repair duties.²⁹

At noon the next day, the first train traveled three miles north of Langfang until track damage again stopped it. The stalled rolling stock created an irresistible target and some 300 Boxers struck. Allied troops dismounted, drove the Boxers back, and then pursued them, eventually killing eighty Chinese. Simultaneously, the Boxers attacked Langfang station with a force numbering around 2000. The fight was short-lived with the Chinese retiring after half an hour without seizing “Fort Gefion,” leaving 150 dead behind after inflicting only five casualties on a small Italian force.³⁰ At 4:20 p.m., Seymour directed all troops forward of Lofa to move back and reinforce the station that was then under attack. Approximately 400 of them reached Lofa at 5:15 p.m., returning fire from the train as they moved. They dismounted and attacked the Chinese on line with the Russians and French in the center, flanked by the Japanese on the left and British on the right. Forty minutes later, they returned to the train leaving 200 Chinese dead on the field with only two British wounded. After an hour and a half, the train left Lofa and arrived in Langfang at 8:00 p.m.³¹

The expedition made no further significant progress and after a day of work on the track, Admiral Seymour decided to concentrate for the moment on reopening a line of

²⁹ Captain Lieutenant Paul Schlieper (Peking) journal, 12 June 1900, in Sharf and Harrington, *China, 1900*, pp. 49-50. Hereafter referred to as Schlieper Account.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³¹ Mori Journal, p. 74-75.

supply to Tientsin. Having received news of the allied seizure of the Taku Forts the night before, units of the Imperial Army under General Nieh had ended their neutrality and started attacking the stranded expedition. Nieh had arrayed his troops along the railway, originally to protect it from the Boxers, but now his soldiers turned to sabotaging tracks and bridges. One thousand were near Peitsang and 5000 around Yangtsun. Although the Imperial troops were probably far fewer in number than the Boxers, they were armed with modern rifles and artillery instead of the Boxers' muskets and spears. Seymour's Expedition would soon be fighting for its very survival.³²

Past Langfang, a combination of Boxers and regular army troops had inflicted damage on the track that the Allies could not repair with the supplies they had on hand. Despite the desperate pleas that filtered through enemy lines from Peking, the expedition had to look to its own defense. Seymour dispatched a train for the rear on the morning of June 15 but it turned back, unable to get past Yangtsun due to damaged track south of the city. General Nieh, accurately guessing that the Seymour Expedition would get no closer to Peking, moved his force in the direction of Tientsin and prepared to destroy the column as it attempted to retreat.³³ Seymour dispatched a company of German seamen back to Tientsin the next day in another attempt to pick up repair supplies. Faced with destroyed track to the front and rear, the Expedition now confronted the prospect of having to reopen the track in two directions or return to Tientsin on foot.³⁴

While the Germans were attempting to get word to Tientsin, Seymour held council with his senior commanders from each of the foreign contingents. He was reluctant to abandon the rescue effort, but the expedition's inability to move forward or

³² Ibid., p. 75.

³³ Ibid., p. 75.

³⁴ Schlieper Account, p. 51.

backward on the railway was enough to call the viability of the operation into question. Believing that the legations were under the threat of massacre at any moment, he decided to repair the railroad to the rear in order to consolidate his line of supply, and then continue the advance on Peking with the fresh troops and repair materials that arrived in Tientsin during his absence. He divided his force into two groups, ordering the first to move back to Yangtsun to repair the railroad in the direction of Tientsin, and assigning to the second the task of securing the track from Yangtsun through Lofa and Langfang.³⁵

On June 17, the Allies continued work on the track while fighting off marauding bands of Boxers and large units of the Chinese Army. Captain McCalla assumed control of the railroad repair team south of Lofa. German troops seized nearby villages, killing five Chinese while other Allied troops seized three villages near Langfang. The next morning, General Nieh attacked with 5-6,000 troops, a combination of Boxers and Imperials, assaulting the Langfang station twice. The poorly trained Chinese troops were ineffective and they suffered heavy losses – between 400 and 500 combat deaths - while the Allies lost fifteen killed and forty wounded. Trains moving toward Yangtsun discovered the railroad bridge over the Pei-ho unserviceable and the track beyond destroyed as well.³⁶

Seymour convened another council of war in the evening to discuss options now that it was clear that the majority of the enemy troops they faced stood behind them. At this council, there was no more talk of moving toward Peking, but simply saving the

³⁵ Mori Journal, pp. 75-76.

³⁶ Powlett Letter, p. 84.

expedition itself. Seymour decided to return to Tientsin, abandoning the railroad if it was ultimately necessary.³⁷

While the Tientsin garrison was trying and failing to break through and Seymour was making his last effort, German troops in the expedition captured junks on the Pei-ho River to use to transport supplies and wounded. Travel on the railway was too dangerous for wounded and what little supplies remained, so the trains were used to transport reinforcements within the expedition's shrinking perimeter. At 2:20 p.m., a Chinese force 2,000-strong attacked 1,100 Allies at Langfang. The Allies counterattacked and by 5:30 p.m., the Chinese withdrew, leaving 140 of their numbers dead. The Allies lost only ten killed and forty wounded. The last troops at Langfang left at 6:00 p.m., reaching Lofa a half hour later. All Allied trains moved to Yangtsun, consolidating the expedition and abandoning Lofa and Langfang. While they rested from the day's fighting, the soldiers in the expedition could see a glow on the horizon coming from burning buildings in Tientsin.³⁸

The next morning Seymour convened another council of war and informed the allied commanders that he had decided to abandon the railroad completely. His plan was to march along the river while the wounded and supplies moved on the junks. Troops loaded the captured vessels with the remainder of the supplies and nearly fifty wounded, while the rest of the column marched on the roads through the stifling heat along the east bank of the Pei-ho, led by the British with German troops bringing up the rear.³⁹ At 7:30 p.m., the men halted in the small village of Peh-shin-chang for the night.⁴⁰

³⁷ Schlieper Account, p. 55.

³⁸ Mori Journal, p. 77.

³⁹ Schlieper Account, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Mori Journal, p. 78.

The expedition's movement the following day turned into an attack more than a withdrawal. The column began moving at 6:00 a.m. and three hours later found itself engaged in a battle with several hundred Imperial and Boxer troops. English and American troops attacked a village to the front of the column and German troops attacked a village late in the afternoon. The Chinese army used artillery for the first time on the Allies, but a combined charge of English, American, and Japanese broke the enemy formation and dispersed it.⁴¹

The Allies continued to skirmish against Chinese equipped with artillery, smokeless powder and modern rifles. The enemy did not press his attacks in strength and the Allies managed to assault and seize Peitsang before noon. In the evening, the column consolidated on the east bank of the river and put an additional fourteen German wounded on the junks. In view of the growing intensity of Chinese attacks, Seymour decided to conduct further movement only at night.⁴²

The column left its bivouac at the village of Lian-tsang at 1:00 a.m. and deployed to overcome an ambush at Mu-rei-cha. It returned fire and continued movement after a thirty-minute exchange. By 4:25 a.m., the lead elements of the expedition had reached the outskirts of the Hsiku Arsenal six miles north of Tientsin's Native City. The junks moved upstream to protect the wounded from rifle fire coming from the complex of thirty buildings, 240 yards square and surrounded by a mud wall, while the column took shelter behind the riverbank 200 meters from the Chinese. Two companies of Germans and the Americans crossed the river and assaulted the arsenal, forcing the Chinese to flee in confusion. The British followed and by 5:30 a.m., the arsenal, one of the largest in all of

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 78.

⁴² Schlieper Account, p. 61.

China, was in allied hands.⁴³ They captured 38,000 rifles and 38,000,000 rounds of ammunition, which they used to defend against Chinese attacks by 7,000 of General Nieh's troops for four hours. The attacks continued until the next morning, eventually leaving six British killed.⁴⁴ During the night of June 23 and into the morning, a hundred British Marines patrolled toward the railroad attempting to link up with Tientsin. Chinese troops ambushed them and they retreated with five men killed.⁴⁵

Seymour gathered his senior leaders to assess the situation and, despite their proximity to the concessions, he decided to remain in place rather than fight on to Tientsin. By this point, 200 Allied troops were unable to walk due to wounds and it would take 800 men to transport them, leaving the Expedition with 1000 effectives. The risk of ambush in the open, fighting against what could be up to 15,000 Chinese under Nieh, was too great and the Expedition remained in the Arsenal throughout June 24. At 7:00 a.m. the next morning, the beleaguered Allies saw a large body of troops moving from Tientsin along the railroad. The Hsiku defenders realized the column was a friendly relief force and it reached the Arsenal at 8:10 a.m., assisting the expedition members in repulsing a Chinese attack. During the afternoon, Seymour had the provisions and all wounded moved across the river and at dusk the expedition slept on the opposite bank, leaving a skeleton force within the arsenal to prevent the appearance of it being abandoned. Before dawn, the allies moved to Tientsin along the railroad while British marines began destroying the arsenal. The destruction reached an explosive climax an hour later and by 10:20 a.m., all forces arrived in Tientsin without incident.⁴⁶

⁴³ Mori Journal, p. 79.

⁴⁴ Powlett Letter, p. 85.

⁴⁵ Mori Journal, p. 80.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 80-81.

When Seymour reentered Tientsin on June 26, sixteen days after he had left, the expedition's total casualties were sixty killed and 230 wounded.⁴⁷ The railroad was in shambles, the Chinese were emboldened, Tientsin's native city bristled with Chinese artillery, and the legations in Peking were no closer to being relieved than they had been two weeks before. The Seymour Expedition had been a failure.

The expedition did bring some important lessons to the attention of the Allied leaders. First, the lack of a secure line of communication would doom operations into the Chinese interior. Before moving to Peking, the Allies had to secure either the railroad or the river, preferably both. Secondly, the introduction of the Chinese army as an opponent radically increased the number of combat troops needed for a second expedition to Peking. The Boxers were fanatics armed with swords and knives. Poorly trained though it was, the Chinese Army was well armed and capable of fielding large formations. Ad hoc units made of naval infantry and small marine contingents might have sufficed against the Boxers, but stood little hope against the Chinese regulars. Because of Seymour's near catastrophe, the Allies postponed a second relief expedition from the end of July to mid-August.

⁴⁷ Powlett Letter, p. 85.

CHAPTER 3

CAPTURE OF TIENTSIN AND CLIMAX OF FIGHTING IN PEKING

The difficulty and ultimate failure of Seymour's Expedition convinced the allies that a deliberate attack on Peking was going to be much harder than many originally thought and would require careful preparation. Unfortunately for the Americans, their failure to participate in Seymour's Expedition in any substantial numbers meant that the lessons learned of the need for reconnaissance and detailed planning they would have to learn again during the assault on Tientsin. The American Ninth Infantry Regiment failed to plan, reconnoiter, or rehearse for the assault, and its use of outdated tactics resulted in a casualty rate of twenty-five percent.

The fighting around Tientsin was, in many ways, a microcosm of the siege in Peking except for the fact that the urban terrain around Tientsin favored the Allies. The concessions' defenders had two advantages over their counterparts in Peking. First, the foreign settlements were outside the Native City, so the Chinese were never able to fully invest them, relying instead on long-range rifle and artillery fire, coupled with short furious assaults, to wear down the defenders. The proximity of the allied reinforcements landing at Tongku, and the Chinese inability to surround the concessions, allowed supplies and reinforcements to enter sporadically. Tientsin's size and importance as a commercial center astride the Pei-ho and the railroad that connected it with Peking and Tongku made it the ideal location for an allied assembly area to prepare for the eventual attack on Peking. After the Taku Forts, the Chinese-held part of Tientsin, known as the Native City, was the allies' next target.

The first U.S. ground troops to arrive at Tientsin in substantial numbers after McCalla and his small expedition were marines from the Philippines. Their experience was typical of U.S. troops who left their ships and went directly into the fighting early in the campaign. On their barge trip up the Pei-ho, they saw the devastation the fighting was wreaking on the countryside:

Then floating slowly down to the gulf, dead Chinese began to appear. The bodies were swollen twice normal size. Some drifted against the banks and stuck in the mud where wolfish dogs tore and gnawed at them. Debris and refuse in every disgusting form floated along with those dead Chinese. Thick stifling stench began to fill the air.

The marines landed at Tientsin, marched through the British concession, and bivouacked in a building where they quickly integrated into the growing defense. The bodies of dead Boxers still littered the ground where they had fallen rushing the railroad station “several nights before.”¹

Ultimately the Ninth Infantry Regiment would pay the price for the Americans’ failure to learn from Seymour’s Expedition during the assault on Tientsin’s native city. After taking a tug up the Pei-Ho from the Gulf of Pechili, two battalions with Colonel Emerson H. Liscum arrived on July 11. The third battalion failed to arrive in time for the battle, disembarking from their river transport the next day. Eventually committed to the assault on Tientsin without a clear idea of what it was to do, the regiment took severe losses and accomplished little.²

¹ Frederic M. Wise, *A Marine Tells it to You*, pp. 28-29. Wise was a Second Lieutenant with the American Marine contingent.

² Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Coolidge (Tientsin) telegram to Corbin, n.d. (received 25 July 1900), in United States, U.S. Army Center of Military History, *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition, April 15, 1898 to July 30, 1902*, p. 438. Hereafter referred to as USACMH, *Correspondence*. Coolidge was the Deputy Commander of the Ninth Infantry and assumed command following Colonel Liscum’s death.

Brigadier General A. R. F. Dorward, a British former commander of the Chinese Wei-hai-wei Regiment from Hong Kong, was the senior British army commander in China and the overall allied leader during the Tientsin assault, while Admiral Seymour returned to his ships and exercised overall command of all British forces from the Taku Roads. Dorward began making plans for an assault on the Native City in concert with other allied commanders on July 10, the action to take place two days later. Ironically, he postponed the date of attack by one day at the request of the Russian commander. This postponement allowed the Ninth Infantry to participate in the battle; otherwise, it would have arrived too late. The plan was simple, as it had to be, given the broad variety of units from different national contingents involved. American, British, French, and Japanese troops had the task of breaching the South Gate of the city. Simultaneously, French, German and Russians would attack Chinese artillery batteries to the northeast, and then assist in isolating the city from that side.³

During the night of July 12, Dorward convened a council of war with all the senior leaders from the various military contingents attending. Colonel Liscum, commander of the Ninth Infantry Regiment, attended at 6:00 p.m. without any aides. Liscum was seeing the plan for the first time, having just arrived in Tientsin that morning with his headquarters and two battalions, whereas the other commanders had been studying it and preparing their troops for the past forty-eight hours. Upon his return from the meeting, he instructed his adjutant, Captain Charles R. Noyes, that there would be an

³ Major E. W. M. Norie, *Official Account of the Military Operations in China 1900-1901*, pp. 35-37.

additional conference the next morning to finalize the details amongst subordinate commanders.⁴

The First Battalion under Major Jessie Lee and the Second Battalion under Major James Regan, Ninth Infantry Regiment, awoke in the middle of the night and mustered in the darkness outside the Po-Quilo Mortuary beside Tientsin University. At 3:30 a.m., they fell in the allied column behind some artillery detachments and in front of the British Naval Brigade. The majority of the allied force, composed of Japanese Cavalry, Austrian sailors, Japanese infantry, Welsh Fusiliers, the Wei-Hai-Wei regiment from Hong Kong, and American Marines was to their front. The column left the concession through the south Taku Gate, turned west and briefly halted. The British Naval Brigade, apparently in the wrong location, passed the Ninth and continued forward. Once moving again, the column followed a country road and then turned to the north where it began to take intermittent and ineffective artillery fire from the Chinese City. This route ran parallel to a mud wall ten feet high and ten feet wide at its top, 1,000 yards from the city walls. The wall protected the marching troops from small arms fire coming from the city, but they were still vulnerable to artillery and sniper fire, though it did not significantly impede their progress. The column's confusing assembly in the early morning prevented any kind of "conference" from taking place, and the Ninth moved into the attack without adequate knowledge of the terrain or the general plan.⁵

The allied artillery within the concessions delayed firing in support of the attack until 4:20 a.m., twenty minutes later than Dorward ordered, while the confused column of

⁴ Captain Noyes (Tientsin) official report to Major J. M. Lee, 16 July 1900, in Brigadier General A. S. Daggett, *America in the China Relief Expedition*, p. 165. Hereafter referred to as Noyes Report.

⁵ Sydney Adamson (Tientsin) account for *Leslie's Weekly*, (July 1900), in Frederic A. Sharf and Peter Harrington, *China 1900: The Eyewitnesses Speak*, p. 125. Adamson was a war correspondent who had traveled with the Ninth Infantry since it left the Philippines. Hereafter referred to as Adamson Account.

allied forces untangled itself. The artillery had little effect on the Chinese guns themselves, but drew enemy fire to the Allied battery and the settlements, preventing the Chinese from targeting the approaching column for the first few hours of its march. Stray artillery rounds, possibly from a French piece, struck a magazine on the Lutai Canal bank. The resulting explosion, loud enough to be heard as far away as Taku, sent a plume of smoke 600 feet into the air, unhorsed several nearby Cossacks and injured their commander, General Stessel. Now both columns in the planned two-prong attack were in disarray, one with a confusing march-order and the other with no leader.⁶

The Allied battle plan was to assault over the 1000 yards of broken ground in front of the city's south gate and breach it. American marines were on the extreme left and extending to their right were the Welsh Fusiliers and Japanese. The Ninth Infantry and Wei-Hai-Wei Regiment followed in support, though the Americans in the Ninth were not clear as to whom they were supporting and where. Forward was depending on artillery within Tientsin and naval guns from the *H.M.S. Terrible* mounted on the mud wall to suppress the defenders while the infantry advanced. The Japanese planned to advance boldly, straight toward the city walls, with explosive charges they brought to destroy the gate and allow the allies into the city.⁷

The Ninth Regiment pressed forward to a mud wall before a canal. Chinese defenders had fallen back and Allied forces were streaming through a gap, across a small bridge over the canal and through a gate in the dike beyond. The Ninth moved up behind the British Naval Brigade, halted at the gate, and stopped, deployed on line fronting the western arsenal, a small cluster of buildings south of the walled Native City. Small arms

⁶ Bayly (Tientsin) journal, n.d. (July 1900), *ibid.*, pp. 116-17.

⁷ Wise, *A Marine Tells it*, p. 34.

fire from the city walls hit “a man every few minutes” and it was while stopped here that they could see the explosion of the magazine to the northeast. Dorward told Liscum to move forward to the left of the Japanese and secure their line, so the breaching teams could commence the assault on the South Gate. Confused and lost, the Ninth moved forward on the right, between the Japanese and a nest of Chinese troops occupying mud huts on the right flank. Liscum sought clarification after he had started the move, and Dorward told the regiment that it was in the wrong place, but it should still move forward in any case and get under cover.⁸ The regiment advanced in skirmish order across an open field and took shelter behind a second mud wall. The first battalion tied in with the Japanese on the left and the second battalion on the right. The second battalion had no one but hostile Chinese on its right flank.⁹ By 7:30 a.m., the regiment had taken eight casualties with one man killed.¹⁰

Just before 8:00 a.m., using tactics better suited to a parade ground review than an assault on restricted terrain, Colonel Liscum led the Ninth Regiment over the mud wall, across the canal, and into the open ground beyond. Due to the constricted ground, only one company was able to move at a time. He deployed the regiment on line, and then reoriented the regiment to suppress Chinese fire from the group of huts 1000 yards to the right. Liscum ordered an immediate assault and the regiment moved its line forward until it was stopped by a small canal.¹¹ The regiment remained in this position, exposed to intense small arms fire and shrapnel a hundred yards away and unable to move forward

⁸ Noyes Report, p. 167.

⁹ Major Lee (Tientsin) official report to Coolidge, 21 July 1900, in Daggett, *China Relief Expedition*, p. 159. Hereafter referred to as Lee Report. Lee was the senior commander on the field during the Tientsin Battle until relieved afterwards by Coolidge.

¹⁰ Adamson Account, p. 126.

¹¹ Noyes Report, pp. 167-68.

because of the water, three to eight feet deep, or backward because of the volume of fire. After two hours in this position, the Ninth Regiment's casualty list grew to include Regan, Noyes, and Liscum, who fell mortally wounded. Major Lee was now the senior officer and he reorganized the chain of command, putting Lieutenant Joseph Frazier in charge of the Second Battalion and Captain Andre W. Brewster in charge of the First.¹²

The only hope for relieving the pressure on the regiment was for another allied unit to make a flanking movement to the right and enfilade the Chinese position. Noyes sent a soldier from Company B back to request this from Dorward, but he returned without success.¹³ Lee then sent First Lieutenant Lawton back to Dorward to inform him of the situation and request assistance. The enemy fire was so intense, Lawton returned to the regiment two hours later, having been wounded twice, and was promptly wounded again in the foot while he was making his report to Lee. Dorward sent a company of American marines and the British Naval Brigade to reinforce the Ninth, but they could do little and waited until nightfall to assist the regiment in withdrawing.¹⁴ Noyes sent another runner to Dorward, asking the British Naval Brigade to execute the attack on the Ninth's right flank, but the sailors were unable to move due to the heavy Chinese fire.¹⁵ By 4:00 p.m., Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Coolidge, commanding the just-arrived Third Battalion, appeared with two companies and asked permission to reinforce his pinned parent regiment. Regarding the commitment of additional men a waste of effort, Dorward refused, telling Coolidge to wait for dusk when he could withdraw the regiment

¹² Lee Report, pp. 159-60.

¹³ Noyes Report, pp. 167-68.

¹⁴ Lee Report, p. 161.

¹⁵ Noyes Report, pp. 167-68.

under the cover of darkness.¹⁶ After nightfall, the regiment pulled back to the south gate of the western arsenal, where Lee reported to Coolidge and turned control of the Ninth Infantry over to him. The regiment had lost seventeen men killed, including Liscum, and seventy-one wounded out of an initial 433 who had started out that morning.¹⁷

Elsewhere in the fighting, the American marines on the left had moved as far as 600 yards from the walls when Chinese fire from the city stopped them. They maintained this exposed position all day, running low on water and ammunition and losing soldiers to heat prostration. The marines moved from this location at one point to guard against the possible flanking attempt by Chinese cavalry, but the horsemen were most likely running away as they did not appear again. In the evening, the marines withdrew behind the shelter of the mud wall to continue guarding the flanks of the allied line while the Japanese remained by the South Gate.¹⁸

Casualties in the Ninth Infantry were paltry compared to those suffered by the Japanese. As the main effort, charged with breaching the gate, they had moved forward to the walls and then been stopped abruptly by the defenders' fire. Unable to move in any direction, the Japanese remained in position until nightfall when they were finally able to breach the gate at 3:00 a.m. After an hour of street fighting within the city, the allies had complete control.

The total loss for allied forces in the assault was 775 with 215 of those being American. Forty marines fell dead or wounded. Several American casualties were

¹⁶ Adamson Account, p. 146.

¹⁷ Lee Report, p. 162.

¹⁸ Wise, *A Marine Tells it*, pp. 35-36.

soldiers on the “sick list,” many from heat prostration. The Japanese and Russians accounted for the majority of the remaining casualties.¹⁹

The Americans had not conducted themselves well in their first large-scale engagement of the campaign. Liscum failed to plan for the assault, conduct a reconnaissance of the battlefield, or give his subordinates an indication of what he expected of them. The tactical employment of the regiment did not take into account the complex terrain that inhibited the broad maneuvers Liscum attempted, or the effects of deadly Chinese rifle and artillery fire on troops bunched together in the open. Following the battle, General Dorward magnanimously took responsibility for the Ninth Regiment’s precarious employment and credited the regiment with the crucial task of protecting the allied assault’s right flank throughout the day. His praise, polite though it was, did not hide the fact that the American infantry had to make up for poor tactics and leadership with bravery and sacrifice.²⁰

The Chinese defense of Tientsin occurred simultaneously with the most concerted attacks against the Peking legations to date. Since the allies had seized the Taku forts, the Chinese government saw itself as fighting against foreign invasion. On June 28, a dispatch from the Imperial Court to all the viceroys and governors read:

Whereas open war has broken out between China and the Foreign Powers, and the Boxer Society round Tientsin and throughout Chi-li, cooperating with the Imperial troops, have been victorious, we have already issued Decrees praising their bravery. These loyal people are to be found throughout the empire, and all Governors and Viceroys, if they can raise forces from their number, can rely on them to oppose the insolence of the foreigners with the greatest success. The high provincial authorities shall therefore memorialize immediately regarding their plans of campaign. The Viceroys of the Tang-tse and the coast provinces are

¹⁹ Remy (Chefoo) telegram to Bureau of Navigation, n.d. (received 17 July 1900), USACMH, *Correspondence*, p. 429.

²⁰ Dorward (Tientsin) letter to Daggett, 15 July 1900, in Daggett, *China Relief Expedition*, p. 157.

hereby commanded to use their most strenuous endeavors to put these instructions into effect.

The legations' defeat would eliminate the justification for the impending Allied attack on capital and free up troops to intercept the foreign armies.²¹

On July 13, as the battle in Tientsin raged, a battalion of 500 Chinese infantry attacked along the wall from the Ha-ta men Gate, down the long dirt ramp which led up to the top from the street south of the German legation. Once they reached the base of the ramp, American and German marines engaged them from two sides and bereft of leadership or direction, the Chinese troops milled about in confusion, taking heavy casualties. By the end of the attack, the Allies had inflicted over 300 casualties without losing a man.²²

The next day the Chinese shifted their focus to the French legation where they had been attempting to mine under the buildings. The French, hearing the digging, counterattacked, and the Chinese detonated the explosives, killing several Chinese and two French soldiers.²³ That night the German and American marines advanced their barricades on the wall 200 yards in an attempt to prevent an attack like the one that had occurred the day before. The move forward placed the American positions over the sluice gate for the first time, allowing them to secure this vital entrance as a possible avenue for the relief force. The advance did not prevent the Chinese from placing fire along the north side of the wall, however, and supply trips to the marines were only possible at night.²⁴

²¹ Norie, *Official Account*, p. 22.

²² Upham Diary, p. 162.

²³ Andrews Account, p. 186.

²⁴ Upham Diary, pp. 162-63.

Tientsin's fall and the failure to overwhelm the legations from the wall or by mining convinced the Chinese government that it was impossible to defeat the foreigners militarily and that it therefore should seek some sort of accommodation. Chinese authorities, in fact, already had made small gestures of conciliation. Prince Ching, a high-ranking member of the court, for example, had sent an offer of shelter in the Tsungli-Yamen to the legations.²⁵ Officials in the Tsungli-Yamen delivered a telegram to Conger from Secretary Hay and fresh fruit from the Chinese government. Conger was unimpressed by the Chinese beneficence. "In British legation under continued shot and shell from Chinese troops," he reported in a telegram that reached Washington on July 20. "Quick relief only can prevent general massacre."²⁶ On July 17, Chinese officials arranged for a cease-fire that provided for no advance beyond current positions and no construction of new barricades. The Allies took the opportunity to rest and repair their defenses, while the Chinese busied themselves with removing bodies from the Tartar Wall.²⁷

The next day the cease-fire began to weaken after the first quiet night in several weeks. American marines warned Chinese troops building a new barricade on Legation Street to stop construction. The Americans then fired on them, using the "international" until they dispersed. The Americans set to work strengthening their existing barricades, as their limited manpower prevented them from expanding the defense even if they had wanted to. The end to the fragile quiet came on July 29, when Chinese troops fired on some servants in the American legation. The Americans responded by shooting some

²⁵ Andrews Account, p. 186.

²⁶ Conger (Peking) to Secretary of State John Hay, n.d. (July 1900), quoted in telegram to Corbin, 20 July 1900, USACMH, *Correspondence*, p. 433.

²⁷ Upham Diary, p. 164.

Chinese, and a general engagement started. Two days later the Americans observed large numbers of Chinese reinforcements entering the city through the Chien-men Gate.²⁸

The Chinese were close to their last efforts. The relief expedition was approaching the city walls and the attacks against the legations grew increasingly feeble. On August 12, Chinese troops near the Ha-ta men Gate attempted to shoot with a large smooth bore cannon, to no effect. American marines attacked the next morning and temporarily hoisted the American flag over the gate at 5:00 a.m. Repeated attempts by the legation ministers to meet with their Chinese counterparts at the Tsungli-Yamen failed, the Chinese refusing to attend, claiming that allied attacks had killed many Chinese.²⁹

Chinese recalcitrance was no large concern to the legations because on the morning of August 14, they woke to artillery and disciplined rifle volleys near the Sha-huo men Gate, eastern entrance to the Chinese City, followed by the rapid fire of a Maxim gun. The sunrise brought to view allied artillery shells, fired from outside the city walls, bursting over the Imperial City. Deliverance was at hand.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 164-66.

²⁹ Upham Diary, p. 167.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 167-69.

CHAPTER 4

ADVANCE AND ASSAULT ON PEKING

The Allied assault on Peking owed more to the Chinese failure to mount an effective defense than its own skillful employment. Although the Allies worked together well on several occasions, each contingent strived to satisfy its own objectives, often at the expense of its partners.

The start of the allied march from Tientsin on August 4 was a fight against topography more than it was against the Chinese. Without the use of the railroad, the Relief Expedition had to depend on the Pei-ho, and a long train of junks and sampans, for its supply column. Hot, dry weather caused dust to choke the roads and the water level in the Pei-ho fell daily, inhibiting the junks' movement. Chinese Army units busied themselves destroying the dikes along the river in order to inundate the countryside, further impeding the allied movement. The Relief Expedition made steady progress, however, using cavalry to screen to the front and rear, and traveling in a column strong enough to deter any serious Chinese attack.

General Sir Alfred Gaselee had arrived in Tientsin on July 27, 1900 to take command of the Relief Expedition from Dorward. The allied force was composed of 10,000 Japanese, 4,000 Russians, 3,000 British, 2,000 Americans, and smaller contingents of French, Germans, and Austro-Italians. American troops were still arriving in China when the relief expedition left Tientsin, and later 5,000 would reach Peking, but Gaselee's concern over the legations' safety influenced his decision to start the expedition without waiting for the additional troops.¹

¹ Major E. W. M. Norie, *Official Account of the Military Operations in China 1900-1901*, pp. 52-55.

The bloody fighting for Tientsin convinced the Allies that rescuing the legations would be far more difficult than they first envisioned. Gaselee had to weigh his overwhelming urgency to get to Peking and relieve the siege with the potential for a repeat of Seymour's debacle should he leave from Tientsin with an inadequate force. Coolidge anticipated a repeat of the Tientsin assault followed by a lengthy occupation and requested additional artillery, shallow draft boats, and winter clothing from the War Department.²

The Allies set out on both sides of the Pei-ho, canalized by the inundated countryside, and faced the Chinese army first at Peitsang on August 5. The Japanese had sent an 800 strong reconnaissance in force in that direction before the expedition had started at the beginning of the month and had been repelled by an entrenched enemy.³ This time, leading the allied expedition, the Japanese contingent, with the British in support, assaulted and seized the town, suffering 300 casualties, whereas the British took only minor losses.⁴ American involvement was limited to a short engagement by the Marines with a small band of Chinese, whom they quickly drove off.⁵

The railroad crossed the Pei-ho at Yangtsun, making the city a vital objective for the Allied and natural logistical base in route to Peking. The movement north from Peitsang and attack on the city began on August 6 at 3:00 in the morning. The lead elements of the allied contingent made contact with the Chinese, estimated at 3,000 with four batteries, a mile and a half from the city. The Allied forward elements drove the

² Coolidge (Tientsin) to Corbin, 21 July 1900, in United States, U.S. Army Center of Military History, *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition, April 15, 1898, to July 30, 1902*, p. 437. Hereafter referred to as USACMH, *Correspondence*.

³ Remy (Taku) to Bureau of Navigation, n.d., (received 2 August 1900), *ibid.*, p. 443.

⁴ Lieutenant Roger Keyes (Peking) letter to Miss Bee, 6 September 1900, in Frederic A. Sharf and Peter Harrington, *China, 1900: The Eyewitnesses Speak*, p. 203. Hereafter referred to as Keyes Letter.

⁵ Frederick M. Wise, *A Marine Tells it to You*, p. 47.

Chinese back until they took cover in prepared earthworks near the railroad bridge. Gaselee's main body crossed the Pei-ho River at dawn, moved away from the railroad for brief distance and then halted within distant view of the Chinese fortifications to allow the tail to catch up. The American Fourteenth Infantry Regiment had arrived too late to participate in the assault on Tientsin, but now its third battalion formed in two company columns, with the second column behind, and its right tied into the railroad grade. British Sikhs moved forward and occupied a position on the left of the Fourteenth but the restrictive terrain caused their line to extend itself into the American formation, separating the third and second battalions.⁶

The Fourteenth Infantry established a skirmish line at 10:00 a.m. tied in with the British, with Russians to the rear. Repeating the regimented drill that led to disaster for the Ninth Infantry at Tientsin, Major Quinton, commanding the third battalion, advanced "in line" followed by the second battalion under Captain Eastman. The Chinese opened fire on them with artillery while they were a mile and half from the village. The regiment advanced to within 1500 yards of the enemy and began to take severe rifle fire.⁷ They remained in this position for over two hours, while Chaffee attempted to get Reilly's Battery (Fifth Artillery) established in a good firing point to support their attack.⁸ The battery was busy supporting the fighting on the other side of the railroad, but the Americans and British showed impressive discipline and patience in waiting for the artillery's support before they advanced.

⁶ Major William Quinton (Yangtsun) official report to Daggett, 7 August 1900, in A. S. Daggett, *America in the China Relief Expedition*, p. 182. Hereafter referred to as Quinton Report.

⁷ Brigadier General A. S. Daggett (Yangtsun) official report to General Chaffee, 7 August 1900, *China Relief Expedition*, p. 177. Hereafter referred to as Daggett Report.

⁸ Private Harry J. Dill (Peking) journal, 5 September 1900, in Sharf and Harrington, *China 1900*, p. 199. Dill was a soldier in the Fourteenth Infantry.

On the eastern side of the railroad, the Ninth Infantry, American marines, and Reilly's Battery mounted a supporting attack to assist the western side by assaulting the villages to their front, with a squadron of British cavalry screening the advance.⁹ They had trailed the Fourteenth Infantry and the Sikhs in the column, not having started moving from their encampment at Wang Chwang, outside of Peitsang, until 4:30 that morning. After crossing the river on a pontoon bridge, the Ninth Infantry traveled parallel to the railroad for five miles before it halted to the right of Reilly's Battery and 500 yards to their rear.¹⁰

The British cavalry made contact with eight companies of Chinese infantry, supported by three guns in a village to their right. Reilly's Battery deployed on the east (right) side of the railroad to suppress the guns located toward their northeast at 11:00 a.m. The battery opened fire 500 yards from the railroad and engaged the village 2400 yards distant, setting it ablaze. The battery continued to engage Chinese north and east of their position while they were still visible. Reilly sighted enemy to the west but friendly infantry was too close (the Fourteenth Infantry and British Sikhs) so the battery held fire, supporting the fighting on the right until Chaffee ordered it to displace.¹¹

Chaffee told the Ninth to angle toward the village on the right of the Allied line. The Third Battalion led the attack, with the First Battalion following behind and to the left, securing its flank with the railroad embankment. Once through the village, the regiment pressed on through a cornfield toward a second one, receiving small arms and

⁹ Chaffee (Peking) official report to Adjutant General, 1 September 1900, in Daggett, *China Relief Expedition*, p. 170. Hereafter referred to as Chaffee Report.

¹⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Coolidge (Peking) official report to Chaffee, 20 August 1900, in Daggett, *China Relief Expedition*, p. 188. Hereafter referred to as Coolidge Report.

¹¹ Lieutenant C. P. Summerall (Peking) official report to Chaffee, 18 August 1900, in Daggett, *China Relief Expedition*, p. 192. Summerall took over Reilly's Battery following Reilly's death in Peking. Hereafter referred to as Sumerall Report.

artillery fire. While the Ninth extended to the right and the Fourteenth was engaged on the left that the command and control system began to break down. Couriers brought conflicting orders to the Ninth ordering it to assault the second village and simultaneously move back toward a water tower adjacent to the railroad on their left. Coolidge decided to continue on to the village where the assault stalled once the severely dehydrated soldiers discovered a functional well with potable water.¹² The First Battalion returned to support Reilly's Battery in its skirmish with Chinese hidden in the corn adjacent to its position. By 3:00 p.m., all fire had ceased and the regiment moved to Yangtsun for half an hour, then to the railroad crossing to go into camp for the night.¹³

General Dorward, commanding the British, requested artillery support for the Fourteenth Infantry and Sikhs assaulting on the left, so Chaffee ordered Reilly's Battery to displace to the west side of the railroad. The battery set up, but in the confusion, a band of Chinese had concealed themselves in the tall corn directly in front of the battery's new position. The gunners turned their attention to driving the Chinese away from their own position and provided little support to the developing attack on the left, where they had better visibility than any other artillery battery on the battlefield.¹⁴

The Fourteenth Infantry and British assaulted simultaneously and as they closed on the village, the American infantry was intermingled with British Sikhs and lost cohesion. At 300 yards, the Third Battalion took cover and began suppressing the Chinese who were engaging them from behind a walled compound. After a short burst of firing, the men assaulted on line, through a field of standing corn. Upon emerging from

¹² Major Morris C. Foote (Peking) official report to Coolidge, 18 August 1900, in Daggett, *China Relief Expedition*, pp. 190-91. Foote commanded the first battalion of the Ninth Infantry.

¹³ Coolidge Report, pp. 188-89.

¹⁴ Summerall Report, p. 192.

the field, the battalion halted briefly to reorient and then rushed the last hundred yards to drive the Chinese from the village. As the Second Battalion moved forward in support, Quinton redirected the Third Battalion to the railroad embankment on the right where the men suppressed a “small cannon” near the railroad bridge.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the Fourteenth Infantry and British Sikhs started to receive artillery fire from three directions after they had seized the village.¹⁶ The culprit was Allied artillery set up to the rear, which had failed to identify its targets, resulting in nearly thirty casualties. The Second Battalion was guilty of faulty identification as well. Immediately after occupying the village, some American soldiers from E and H companies joined Quinton on the railroad embankment to their right and shot at a group of Japanese with indeterminate results.¹⁷

By 2:30 p.m., the battle was over and the Fourteenth began to reassemble. The Fourteenth Infantry drove the Chinese from the town at a cost of seven killed and fifty-seven wounded, the majority of these coming from the third battalion, which led the attack. The Ninth Infantry advanced through the city on the east side losing six men to wounds.¹⁸

At the end of the day, the Allies had won their logistical base, but many Chinese had escaped with all of their artillery. Although the casualties were relatively light, considering the number of forces engaged (eleven British killed with thirty wounded and twelve Americans killed with forty wounded) the heat was the most formidable enemy. The Allies’ struggle to maintain a solid supply line up to this point meant that most soldiers went into the battle suffering from dehydration. The Ninth Infantry and the

¹⁵ Quinton Report, pp. 183-84.

¹⁶ Daggett Report, p. 177.

¹⁷ Captain Frank F. Eastman (Yangtsun) official report to Daggett, 7 August 1900, in Daggett, *China Relief Expedition*, pp. 180-81.

¹⁸ Chaffee Report, p. 172.

Marine Regiment both stopped their advance and pursuit of Chinese due to lack of water.

¹⁹ The Americans and British did cooperate with each other, albeit poorly. The Americans, as at Tientsin, remained wedded to their habit of assaulting across open ground with group formations. Unfortunately for the Allies, Yangtsun would represent their highest degree of cooperation in the campaign.

After the fighting at Yangtsun had stopped, Chaffee attended a conference on August 8 with the other Allied leaders. The commanders decided to begin movement toward Peking the next day with fourteen thousand troops, following the Pei-ho River to Tungchow and then turning inland to Peking. The unknown condition of the legations and rivalry among Allied contingents to be the first to Peking ruled out any thought of delay. The final assault on Peking would show the Allies at their worst as partners, as each vied for the honor of entering the city first. Within the American contingent, Chaffee failed to plan the assault in detail, trusting to improvisation at every level of leadership to carry the day. Thus, the lack of synchronized effort throughout the relief expedition permeated to the company level.²⁰

Washington was just as disconnected from the reality on the ground during the march to Peking as it had been while U.S. troops were assembling at Tientsin and assaulting the Native City. On August 14, Corbin cabled Chaffee that he was to work with the Chinese and other Allied powers to get the legations out of Peking without assaulting the city if possible. Corbin generously added that the final decision of whether or not to enter the city was up to Chaffee based on his assessment of the minister's safety. The War Department clearly did not understand the speed of the column's movement (the

¹⁹ Keyes Letter, p. 203.

²⁰ Chaffee (Yangtsun) to Corbin, 8 August 1900, in United States, USACMH, *Correspondence*, p. 453.

assault on Peking had already begun when this cable was sent) or other nations' objectives. Washington still sought to maintain the policy of not engaging Chinese government forces, despite the fighting that had been going on with the Chinese army since the allies seized the Taku Forts. Washington failed to understand that Chaffee was subject to the Allies' plans and that each allied contingent wanted the honor of being the first into the city.²¹

The Allied generals met in the evening of August 12 near Tungchow to plan the final assault and culmination of the expedition. All but the Russians were eager to press on to Peking. General Linievitch, commander of the Russian contingent, claimed that falling water levels on the Pei-ho had slowed his junks and that he needed an extra day to prepare for the attack. The Allies reluctantly agreed. They decided to conduct reconnaissance of the countryside between Tungchow and Peking the next day, move to assault positions on August 14, and assault the city at first light the day following. The generals apportioned the terrain among the contingents and assigned gates in the city walls as objectives. A canal ran from Tungchow to Peking with a road to its north, conveniently dividing the ground. The Japanese and Russians were to approach north of the canal with the Americans moving along the road and the British to the south. The Allies planned to attack simultaneously along the city's east wall when the expedition reached the city. The Russians had the Tung-chih men gate in the Tartar City, the Japanese had the Chi-ho men gate, the Americans were to take the Tung-pien men Gate at the extreme northeast corner of the Chinese City, and the British had the Sha-huo men

²¹ Corbin (Washington, D.C.) telegram to Chaffee, 14 August 1900, *ibid.*, p. 455. Corbin relayed this message through Admiral Fowler in Chefoo.

Gate just to the south of the Americans. Satisfied with the plan, the commanders returned to their headquarters.²²

The next day Chaffee moved forward to reconnoiter with a cavalry troop, Reilly's Battery, and the Fourteenth Infantry. While they were engaging a small group of Chinese in a village, they heard intense firing to their north. The sounds of battle continued throughout the day and the Americans feared the Chinese were making a last desperate attempt to destroy the legations before their rescue. Daggett recalled the American officers' wild conjectures:

Having drawn the allied forces far from their base, had the Chinese concentrated their hordes to carry out the promise of Tung-Fuh-Siang to the Empress Dowager to drive the foreign devils into the sea? Had they at the same time an army moving on Tientsin to cut off supplies and intercept retreat, should any survive to reach that point?²³

The true cause of the fighting was far less sinister. The Russians, deciding that they did not need an extra day to prepare after all, had attacked the Tung-pien men Gate, designated the day before for the Americans, been repulsed, retiring to villages outside the wall. The impulsive Russian attack left the rest of the Allies fearing that another contingent had seized an advantage and all laid plans to begin a general assault the next morning.

During the evening of August 13, the Fourteenth Infantry made its final preparations. The plan was simple: elements of the Sixth Cavalry that had caught up to the American column on August 9 would conduct a reconnaissance to the front, with Companies E, F, and K of the Fourteenth supporting any enemy contact the cavalry

²² Norie, *Official Account*, pp. 63-64.

²³ Brigadier General A.S. Daggett, *America in the China Relief Expedition*, p. 76.

developed. Once the regiment reached Peking, it would still attempt to enter through the Tung-pien men, regardless of what the Russians were doing.²⁴

The Fourteenth Infantry left its bivouac, five miles from Peking, early in the morning on August 14 and marched four miles with the Third Battalion leading the Second, before they started receiving small arms fire from the walls of the Chinese City.²⁵ Soldiers in the front of the column, largely composed of Companies H and E under the direct control of Daggett, rushed through the collection of small buildings that formed Peking's "suburbs" to take shelter at the wall from the Chinese fire. Once there, the American riflemen found holes in the wall where stones had fallen off, which permitted them to scale it. They found the top unoccupied and quickly set to work pulling weapons and additional ammunition up with ropes while more men climbed. By 11:00 a.m., a bugler planted the colors and elements of Companies E and H worked to clear the wall of Chinese in the direction of the Sha-huo men Gate while others secured the Tung-pien men Gate the Russians had assaulted the night before. Companies E and G entered with Reilly's Battery through the now secure gate followed by Company F, which moved up onto the wall to secure the rear of the regiment as it continued forward. The gate was jammed with Russian troops attempting to repeat their assault of the previous day and both contingents were taking fire from a large tower at the southeast corner of the Tartar City.²⁶ The congestion forced the Third Battalion to wait outside the

²⁴ Captain De Rosey Cabell (Peking) official report to Chaffee, 17 August 1900, in Daggett, *China Relief Expedition*, p. 219. Hereafter referred to as Cabell Report. Cabell commanded the elements of the Sixth Cavalry during the assault on Peking.

²⁵ Quinton Report, p. 204.

²⁶ Captain Frank E. Eastman (Peking) official report to Daggett, 18 August 1900, in Daggett, *China Relief Expedition*, p. 200. Eastman commanded the Fourteenth Infantry's second battalion during the assault on Peking.

wall while elements of the Second Battalion moved along and over it, bypassing the gate. Eventually the Third Battalion relieved the Second and it continued into the city.²⁷

The gunners of F Battery, Fifth Artillery (Reilly's Battery), moved with the Fourteenth Infantry throughout the approach and assault on the walls of the Chinese City. The gun trains left their "park" on a plateau five miles from the city and moved south of the canal for three miles before they went into action on the left side of the road. Their first target was the wall tower at the southeast corner of the Tartar City where Chinese soldiers were firing on the Russians and Americans between the Tung-pien men and Sha-huo men gates. The battery fired twenty shots at the tower, setting it on fire. The battery moved forward by platoons, with two guns under Lieutenant Summerall leading the way for a mile and firing at portions of the Tung-pien men Gate. The rest of the battery moved to join them once Summerall was set and engaging. Captain Reilly went with Summerall closer to the city, their target this time being the Tung-pien men Gate. They remained in this position outside the wall, firing on the south and eastern walls of the Tartar City while the remaining four guns moved through the congested gate.²⁸

The regiment moved through the city along a street paralleling the Tartar Wall. Men dropped out of the attack at intervals to move to better firing positions on the roofs of Chinese houses and suppress the enemy on the wall. They moved to the Ha-ta men Gate where the American marines and civilian legation defenders on the wall to the west told them they could enter through the sluice gate further to the west. The Americans had to open the Ha-ta men to get the artillery and horses through, however, and the gunners from Reilly's battery worked to destroy the massive portcullis that blocked it, while the

²⁷ Quinton Report, p. 204.

²⁸ First Lieutenant Louis R. Burgess (Peking) official report to Chaffee, 17 August 1900, in Daggett, *China Relief Expedition*, pp. 222-24. Burgess was the F Battery commander during the assault on Peking.

infantryman moved forward at intervals to dismantle the timbers and suppress the Chinese firing from the nearby tower.²⁹

The British had the longest march of the morning. Although they arrived at the American column an hour after the Americans had started, General Gaselee had a secret advantage he felt would guarantee the British the honor of being the first to relieve the legations. While the Fourteenth Infantry was scaling the wall and dealing with the uncooperative Russians at the Tung-pien men Gate, the British moved to their designated entrance, the Sha-huo, and entered easily because the Chinese had left it unguarded. Gaselee split his column, sending some troops to the Temple of Agriculture in the southwest corner of the Chinese City, where he intended to bivouac for the night and taking the rest northwards toward the Tartar City. He deployed men to the right to make contact with the Americans, whom he assumed were fighting at the Ha-ta men Gate because of the intense firing from that direction. Gaselee knew from a ciphered message from Sir Claude MacDonald sent weeks earlier that there was a sluice gate under the Tartar Wall that the legations controlled and he entered the legation compound through this passage at 2:40 p.m.³⁰

Word reached Chaffee of the British entrance into the Tartar City and he followed them into the legations at 5:00 p.m. with his staff.³¹ Once the Allies entered the Chinese city, American marines inside the legations attacked the deserted Chinese positions and seized control of the Chien-men Gate, opening it from the inside. They fired on Chinese troops milling about in confusion and signaled to American troops in the city below to

²⁹ Daggett Report, pp. 194-95.

³⁰ Norie, pp. 67-68.

³¹ Chaffee (Peking) telegram to Corbin, 15 August 1900, in USACMH, *Correspondence*, p. 458.

enter the Tartar City through the gate.³² The only significant Chinese counterattack of the day came after the first British troops moved through the sluice gate. The legations' defenders moved to their positions just as they had been doing for the past two months and, assisted by an American artillery piece, moved through the Chien-men and up onto the Tartar wall, drove off the Chinese infantry.³³

The assault on the Imperial City was a largely American operation and began early in the morning on August 15, despite a false start the evening before. The legation ministers were sensitive about who should control the final stronghold within Peking and Gaselee made no plans for its assault. The Americans, British, and Russians argued about who would breach and occupy the Imperial City. Chaffee, possibly angry over Gaselee's concealment of the intelligence pertaining to the sluice gate, finally convinced the Russians that Americans should conduct the attack.

The Ti-an men Gate that led from the Tartar City into the Imperial City was a formidable obstacle and Chaffee decided to use the same tactics employed the day before at the Ha-ta men Gate – breach it with artillery and then assault with infantry. At 7:00 a.m., Reilly's Battery moved from its bivouac outside the Tartar Wall to the Imperial City. Summerall's platoon fired several rounds at the first gate, creating holes in the portcullis.³⁴ Soldiers from the Third Battalion used pieces of a chevaux-de-frise that was lying nearby to pry open the gate completely and enter.³⁵

The infantrymen rushed through the breach and found themselves in a narrow courtyard 100 yards by 500 yards, faced with another gate beyond, and taking fire from

³² Private Oscar Upham (Peking) diary, 14 August 1900, in Sharf and Harrington, *China 1900*, pp. 167-69.

³³ Keyes Letter, p. 205.

³⁴ Chaffee Report, p. 174.

³⁵ Quinton Report, p. 206.

Chinese above them. The Americans committed a second platoon in an attempt to overwhelm the ambush, but Chinese fire pinned it down as well in the courtyard. Some soldiers found an alley that led around the courtyard and they used this to gain an enfilade position from the rooftops. This secured the area enough to bring Reilly's Battery forward and his artillery pieces battered down the remaining two doors, enlarging the fields of fire for units outside the gate. A cavalry officer assigned to the Ninth Infantry brought a Gatling gun into action, and this, combined with the suppressive fire from the artillery and infantry, drove the Chinese back.³⁶

The artillery then breached the second gate in the same manner as it had done the first. This process continued for two more gates; the artillery breached them and then the infantry secured them.³⁷ When the Americans stood ready to batter down the final gate, Gaselee, in deference to the legation ministers' diplomatic concerns, ordered the assault stopped. A furious Chaffee obeyed the orders and the Americans withdrew, returning to the Imperial City after the diplomats gave him permission the next day.³⁸ The ministers' vacillation prevented Chaffee from conducting the sustained assault he originally wanted. The unintended delay, however, gave him the opportunity to plan the final assault on the Imperial City in more detail. There was no careful preparation for the first assault, and Quinton later summed up the chaos at the Imperial City gatehouse by saying "The attack was made without adequate reconnaissance."³⁹

Chaffee sent a telegram from Peking on August 15 that arrived in Washington a week later to report that he had relieved the legations and the residents were safe. He

³⁶ Quinton Report, pp. 207-08.

³⁷ Daggett Report, pp. 195-96

³⁸ Chaffee Report, p. 174.

³⁹ Quinton Report, pp. 207-08.

requested additional instructions and recommended canceling the movement of reinforcements into theater due to the problems of supplying a large contingent during the winter. He concluded by recommending the withdrawal of American forces as soon as possible.⁴⁰

The final assault on Peking showed the China Relief Expedition to be an organization united in a common cause, but not necessarily under common leadership. Despite developing a decentralized plan that gave each contingent a portion of the city in which it could act independently, the Allies competed ruthlessly with each other throughout the assault. The Russians attempted to attack opportunistically, the Americans pushed them out of the way, the British withheld information that could have sped up the allied entry into the legation compounds, and the Japanese cooperated with no one.

The Americans again showed bravery and audacity at the individual level but had serious shortcomings as a collective organization. Chaffee and Daggett both led from the front, grabbing any available unit and personally directing it, muddling the chain of command at all levels. The artillery batteries supported the infantry well when positioned with a regiment, but when operating alone they were not integrated into the assault. The Chinese Army did not contest the assault with vigor, or else Chaffee might have faced possible catastrophe while attempting to breach the gates and navigate in the congested city streets. When the shooting stopped, however, the China Relief Expedition had accomplished its mission. The legations and their Chinese charges were alive and safe.

⁴⁰ Chaffee (Peking) telegram to Corbin, 15 August 1900, in USACMH, *Correspondence*, p. 461.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The China Relief Expedition was the first multi-national expeditionary force to which the United States contributed a major ground component. Ultimately, the Expedition accomplished its mission. The Allies rescued the legations in Peking before elements of the Chinese Army and the Boxers could overrun and massacre them. The operation, however, exposed serious shortcomings in American tactics, training, and command that went unnoticed, principally because the Chinese Army did not put up a vigorous fight due to internal conflicts and dissension.

The Russians were able to move troops from Manchuria and the Japanese did not have far to travel from their home islands. The British were involved in the Boer War and most of their troops came from India. The French, Italians, and Austrians participated in limited numbers and the Germans did not arrive in strength until after the allies seized Peking. The United States was able to move a significant quantity of men and materiel to the other side of the world in support of the campaign, but failed to implement a system to keep diplomatic policy abreast of the changing situation on the ground. The Americans were able to marshal the resources of their navy and merchant marine to commit over 15,000 troops to the theater. A tenuous network of telegraph lines stretching across Asia connected the Americans with their government, but ultimately congestion at transmission offices bottlenecked these lines. The War Department on several occasions issued irrelevant instructions, given the actual situation on the ground, and orders pertaining to events that had already occurred.

Tactical control of Army units challenged American commanders throughout the campaign as they struggled with the experience of maneuvering large formations. During the attack on Tientsin, Colonel Liscum failed to plan or conduct reconnaissance before the battle, believing he could maneuver and react without difficulty. The fighting at Yangtsun challenged Chaffee with controlling what were essentially two different engagements on either side of the railroad and his failure to articulate a clear task to Reilly's Battery meant that the artillery supported the assault on the eastern side, but not the more important western side. At Peking, Chaffee and Daggett grabbed whatever subordinate unit was near at hand and took tactical control, regardless of the subordinate chain of command's plan for that unit. Ultimately, American military leaders in China failed to understand that increasingly lethal military technology meant that troops had to disperse and that senior officers could not exercise personal tactical control, but had to depend on their subordinates.

American logistics was a success story on the operational level, but, again, on the tactical level the contingent came up short. The War Department was able to mobilize and transport troops from all over the world to China and if the conflict had gone on longer, over 15,000 American troops would have arrived to bolster Chaffee's command. The Expedition's quartermasters established supply depots at Nagasaki, Tongku and Tientsin that had far more materiel in them than was eventually used. Once the Navy delivered the supplies to the mainland, the Expedition's lack of organic transport made it nearly impossible to transport the stores inland in significant quantities. While improvisation worked, with soldiers and marines commandeering junks, sampans, and horse carts, had the campaign been drawn out into the winter, or the Chinese army

decided to defend Peking and force the allies to conduct a siege, the failure to establish a deliberate logistical system would have developed into a significant constraint.

The American marines who assisted in defending the legations proved that a small number of motivated soldiers could hold out indefinitely in a well-prepared defense against overwhelming numbers, even if the enemy possessed modern weaponry. Their accurate, long-range rifle fire, coupled with the artillery support from the “international” prevented the Chinese from massing at decisive points in their assault.

Ultimately the Chinese decided the campaign through their unwillingness or inability to challenge the allies seriously. The government’s initial vacillation allowed the allies to build and expand a foothold on the mainland. The Chinese Army’s failure to wage determined battle at either Yangtsun or Tungchow and halfhearted attempt to defend Peking gave the allies the false impression that their military prowess won the campaign.

Just over a decade after the China Relief Expedition rescued the legations in Peking, the former allies would find themselves at war with each other. This time, the effects of artillery and machine guns would show their impact on massed troop formations and leaders would come to learn the difficulties involved in controlling subordinates distributed beyond their span of control, especially when operating as part of a coalition. The allies would again face the challenges involved in moving massive amounts of materiel on the battlefield and the United States would deploy troops across an ocean. The allies experienced all of these lessons while conducting operations in China with the China Relief Expedition should they have cared to learn them.

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