

NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND

THE BOXER REBELLION

Bluejackets and Marines in China
1900–1901

EMILY ABDOW





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Naval History and Heritage Command

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INTRODUCTION

On the night of 13 August 1900, Gunner's Mate First Class Joseph Mitchell fired his improvised cannon into Chinese imperial troops mounting their strongest assault on the Legation Quarter in Beijing (then Peking).¹ The Legation Quarter was home to diplomats from 11 foreign powers, including the United States. For 55 days, an ad hoc multinational guard of 407 sailors and marines had protected its shrinking perimeter from attacks by an enemy possessing superior strength and firepower. Mitchell's makeshift cannon, christened the "International Gun," was an innovation born of desperation. Fashioned from a bronze barrel unearthed in the Legation Quarter, mounted on an Italian gun carriage, and firing Russian shells, the crude but mostly effective invention was symbolic of the collaboration between the besieged nations. It was not a well-oiled machine—in fact, it emitted a cloud of smoke every time it fired—but it got the job done.

As Mitchell's cannon answered the Chinese artillery, an international relief force was amassing outside the walls of Beijing. The approximately 20,000-strong coalition of troops from the United States, Great Britain, France, Japan, and Russia had fought its way from the port at Dagu (Taku) through the city of Tianjin (Tientsin) and villages in the Chinese countryside, hampered by blistering heat, destroyed railroads, and internal rivalries. Their common foe was a combined force of Qing (Ching) imperial troops, primarily soldiers of the 40,000-strong Guards Army, and countless "Boxers," members of a Chinese secret society that channeled resentment of foreign influence into ritualistic violence. On New Year's Eve 1899, as the world entered the twentieth century, Boxers had decapitated a British missionary. By June 1900, the red-clad rebels had swept through the cities of Tianjin and Beijing, burning any building that reeked of a foreign presence.

The event that tipped the scales from unlawful rebellion to official war was the battle of the Dagu Forts. As increasingly grim news filtered from foreigners besieged by Boxers, the foreign navies off Dagu seized the forts at the mouth of the Hai (Peiho) River to maintain a line of communication with their compatriots. Enraged by the act of foreign aggression, the empress dowager declared a state of war, committing the Qing imperial army to backing the Boxers.

Though a riverine operation served as the proximate cause for war, the majority of the summer campaign was carried out on land, first by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, and later by the U.S. Army. Of the U.S. services with boots on the ground, the Navy was most out of its element, miles of arid land separating its sailors from their ships. Thus, the Boxer Rebellion was a true test of the American sailor. Fish out of water and allied with bigger fish—great powers such as Russia, Germany, and Great Britain—Navy sailors would need to navigate language barriers and cultural differences, adapt their skillsets to an unfamiliar environment, defeat an enemy that outnumbered them by tens of thousands, and possess a pinch of luck if they were to survive.

BACKGROUND, 1839–1899

European powers began trading with China in the 1500s, drawn by the allure of Chinese luxury goods, particularly porcelain, silk, and tea. Chinese tea proved especially popular among the British, and by 1800, Great Britain's East India Company was purchasing 23 million pounds of tea annually at the price of 3.6 million pounds of silver, a trade pattern that risked draining silver from the British Empire.² Great Britain's solution was to trade a commodity grown in its colonial possession of India: opium. By 1839, China had an estimated 10 million opium smokers, two million of them addicts.³

When the Chinese government cracked down on the illegal opium trade, Great Britain fought the First Opium War (1839–42). The British victory led to the Treaty of Nanjing (Nanking), which allowed the British to reside and trade in five Chinese cities. The United States, eager to compete on the global stage, negotiated with China and signed the Treaty of Wangxia (Wanghia) in 1844. The U.S. treaty also opened five cities, and added protections for American missionaries in China.

In the 1850s, the United States and European powers grew dissatisfied with their treaties' terms and their lack of enforcement by the Qing government. The British seized upon the *Arrow* incident—in which Chinese authorities boarded the British ship *Arrow* to capture suspected pirates—to instigate the Second Opium War (1856–60). The French joined in, and an Anglo-French force defeated the Chinese and burned the Old Summer Palace in Beijing. The resulting Treaty of Tianjin allowed for foreign envoys to reside in Beijing as well as for Christian missionaries to move freely throughout China.⁴

The Legation Quarter in Beijing, home to the diplomatic representatives of foreign nations, spanned about three quarters of a square mile and was bordered by the Tartar Wall to the south and the wall of the Imperial City to the north.⁵ At the end of the nineteenth century, the U.S. minister in Beijing was Edwin Conger, and his goal was the Open Door policy coined by Secretary of State John Hay, in which each nation would have equal access to trade in China. Meanwhile, six powers—Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, and Russia—were carving China into spheres of influence in the “scramble for concessions.”⁶ In 1898, the British

had leased Weihai (Weihaiwei), a port on the north coast of Shandong (Shantung) Province, establishing a naval base and enlisting Chinese subjects despite objections by the Chinese government.⁷ A year prior, the Germans had seized the port of Jiaozhou (Kiaochow) on the south coast of Shandong, then negotiated a 99-year lease of Jiaozhou and the city of Qingdao (Tsingtao). Germany's pretext for occupying Jiaozhou was the murder of two German missionaries, possibly by members of the Big Sword Society, an anti-Christian organization of local Chinese.⁸

Jesuit missionaries had entered China in 1582 during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), ingratiating themselves with the imperial court through gifts of the finest Western technology and the belief that Christianity was compatible with Confucianism. However, when Pope Clement XI forbade Chinese Christian converts from practicing Confucian rites, such as ancestor worship, generations of Qing emperors suppressed missionary activities—that is, until the Treaty of Nanjing opened up five port cities to British citizens, including missionaries.⁹ The Treaty of Tianjin and the 1860 Convention of Beijing opened all of China to Christian missionaries, who established churches, printing presses, schools, and hospitals as they sought to convert local populations. Between 1860 and 1900, the missionary population in China grew from about 80 to over 3,000. By 1900, about 100,000 Chinese people had converted to a Protestant faith and between 700,000 and 800,000 had converted to Catholicism. Shandong Province, the cradle of the Boxer Rebellion, was home to more than 1,000 churches and 55 Christian schools.¹⁰

In December 1899, Minister Conger wrote to Secretary Hay of “a very critical state of affairs among the missionaries and their converts” in Shandong.¹¹ This fragile state was the result of extreme poverty among Chinese workers, and the workers blamed the foreigners for their misfortune. Western modernization efforts, especially railroads and steamships, had increased unemployment and threatened to render entire Chinese industries obsolete. To make matters worse, the Yellow River had flooded in 1898, wiping out harvests, and in 1899, a drought arrived that stretched into 1900. Rumors spread that the foreigners had upset the feng shui of the land with their railroad tracks that ran over sacred burial grounds, mines that disemboweled the earth of its minerals, and church spires that

towered over towns.¹² Posters appeared throughout northern China, bearing messages like this one:

No rain comes from Heaven.
The earth is parched and dry.
And all because the churches
Have bottled up the sky.¹³

Other placards claimed Christianity had oppressed the Buddhist gods, enraging heaven and earth to withhold rain.¹⁴ The thousands of displaced and disillusioned Chinese workers—farmers, river barge crewmen, carters, chair-bearers, camel men, muleteers, and more—were especially susceptible to these pieces of antiforeign propaganda spread by a secret society eager to expand its ranks.¹⁵



A Boxer poster with an antiforeign agenda (Arthur H. Smith, *China in Convulsion*, vol. 1 [New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901], frontispiece.)

The Yihequan (I Ho Chuan), the “Righteous and Harmonious Fists,” had no official leader. It was a people’s movement united in the belief that the foreigners needed to be eliminated from China. Members of this secret society believed they could make themselves impervious to physical harm,

including bullets, through the practice of martial arts. Their public displays of movement inspired the name “Boxers.” They wore red sashes, and their ritual demonstrations coupled with a dramatic message—“Support the Qing, exterminate the foreigners”—proved to be an effective recruiting method.¹⁶

The Boxers’ first targets were not foreigners, but Chinese Christians. While these attacks appeared antireligious, the Boxers’ grievances were primarily secular. Foreign missionaries did not have to answer to local laws, and they often intervened on behalf of converts accused of crimes or embroiled in lawsuits. Local Chinese resented their neighbors who had converted, labeling them as “rice Christians,” driven not by faith but by the resources and power provided by the church.¹⁷



Chinese Christian converts fleeing Beijing, c. 1900. (Library of Congress [LC], LC-USZ62-137106.)

In 1898, a mob of about 1,000 villagers in Shandong Province burned a church under construction on land belonging to a Buddhist temple, the first documented Boxer attack.¹⁸ The summer and fall of 1899 saw Boxer violence escalate from the burning of churches to the gruesome, ritualistic

murders of Chinese Christians. The event that drew the eyes of the West was the beating and beheading of British missionary Reverend Sidney Brooks on 31 December 1899. However, European and American missionaries were not the only ones in danger. Boxers targeted foreign railway workers and merchants—men who personified the Western disruption of Chinese society—and dared to ambush the 1st Chinese Regiment, the unit of British officers and enlisted Chinese stationed in Weihai.¹⁹ By spring of 1900, Boxer activities had spread from Shandong Province across the North China Plain.

The ruler of China, Empress Dowager Cixi, had a dilemma. The Boxers were a lawless uprising, and yet Cixi and the Boxers shared a vision: a China free of foreign influence. In fact, the empress had overthrown her nephew, executed his advisors, and seized control of the throne after he attempted to implement rapid and widespread Western reforms. The thwarted Hundred Days of Reform had been an effort to strengthen an empire in decline. The Qing dynasty had suffered a humiliating defeat to Japan in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), losing Korea as a tributary state, and in 1898, had granted concessions to Russia, Great Britain, Germany, and France. As Japan rose to dominance in Asia and European powers competed to expand their spheres of influence in China, Cixi had a choice: suppress the uprising to mollify the foreigners or use it to her advantage by allowing it to spread. Ultimately, she chose the latter.

ARRIVAL OF THE NAVY, MAY 1900

The U.S. Navy had regularly operated in Asia since the 1840s, when East India Squadron commander Commodore Lawrence Kearny arrived with his flagship *Constellation* and sloop-of-war *Boston* to protect American lives and property during the First Opium War. After the British and Chinese signed the Treaty of Nanjing, Kearny sought assurances that the United States would receive similar trading privileges, leading to the Treaty of Wangxia.

The East India Squadron (renamed the Asiatic Squadron in 1868) safeguarded American shipping in the region and even patrolled the Yangtze River. The sidewheel gunboat *Monocacy* charted the lower Yangtze in 1871, and three years later, *Ashuelot* surveyed nearly a thousand miles of river past Shanghai.²⁰ The Asiatic Squadron operated as best it could, but without a base nearer than Hawaii, it was perennially short of supplies and ammunition. Those logistical constraints improved dramatically when the United States won the Spanish-American War (1898) and took control of the Philippines. Cavite, Philippines, provided the Navy with a strategic naval base, allowing the United States to better project its power in Asia.

When Boxer unrest prompted U.S. minister Edwin Conger in Beijing to request naval support, the gunboat *Wheeling* departed the Philippines in March 1900, patrolling the northern coast of China until 9 May. On 20 May, *Newark*, the first modern cruiser in the U.S. Navy, sailed from Japan for China, flying the flag of Rear Admiral Louis Kempff, second-in-command of the Asiatic Station.²¹ On 28 May, Boxers burned the railroad station at Fengtai, a junction on the Beijing–Tianjin railroad line. Alarmed, the legation ministers met and agreed to send for guards from the ships at Dagu, the French and Russian ministers announcing they had already done so. Before the guards could enter Beijing, however, the ministers needed permission from the Zongli (Tsunqli) Yamen, the Qing government body in charge of foreign policy. Zongli Yamen officials refused the ministers' request. British minister Sir Claude MacDonald replied that the troops were coming. If there were obstructions, he warned, they would come in a force ten times greater.²²

The force that disembarked from *Newark* at Dagu on 29 May included two U.S. Marine detachments under the command of Captain John T. Myers, nicknamed “Handsome Jack.” Myers and his detachment of 25 enlisted marines had been aboard the battleship *Oregon*, which a month later grounded on an uncharted rock in the Bohai Strait. On 24 May, Myers had received orders to transfer his enlisted marines to *Newark*, where he took charge of 23 additional marines under Captain Newt Hall, along with five U.S. Navy sailors: Assistant Surgeon Thomas M. Lippitt, Hospital Apprentice Robert H. Stanley, and three bluejackets with their Colt machine gun.²³



Officers of *Newark* on a lighter on the Hai River en route to Tianjin. *Left to right:* Naval Cadet Charles E. Courtney, Ensign Daniel W. Wurtsbaugh, Captain Newt H. Hall, USMC, Naval Cadet Joseph K. Taussig, Assistant Surgeon Thomas M. Lippitt, and Warrant Machinist Daniel Mullan. (Naval History and Heritage Command [NHHHC], NH-45347.)

At Dagu, Myers’s detachments piled onto a lighter (a flat-bottomed barge) that was pulled by tug up the Hai River to Tianjin. Taking the train from nearby Tanggu (Tongku) was not an option, as railroad officials refused to sell tickets to an armed force without permission from the Chinese viceroy. The detachments arrived in Tianjin on the night of 29

May to a welcoming band playing on the bund and waited for permission from the Chinese government to depart by train for Beijing. On the morning of 31 May, the Zongli Yamen conceded that each legation could supply 30 guards, a limit that was ignored.²⁴

At around 1600 on 31 May, a guard of 55 American sailors and marines boarded the train to Beijing, arriving in the evening with five days' rations, their Colt machine gun with 8,000 rounds, and about 20,000 rounds of rifle ammunition. Their personal belongings had been left behind on *Newark*. Also on board the train were British, French, Italian, Japanese, and Russian sailors and marines from foreign warships off Dagu.²⁵

On the four-mile march from the station to the Zhengyangmen (Chienmen), the main gate of Beijing's inner city, Myers observed that the Chinese thronging either side of the street were "absolutely silent—a silence which seemed more ominous than a demonstration of hostility would have been."²⁶ Captain Bowman H. McCalla, a U.S. Navy officer from *Newark*, accompanied the U.S. relief force to the Legation Quarter, riding on horseback and urging the men to march double time so the Chinese could not close the gates. The Americans led the relief column and were the first to reach Legation Street.²⁷ At the U.S. legation, McCalla met with Minister Conger, then returned to Tianjin, where his forces were stationed, on 2 June. On 3 June, the German and Austrian contingents arrived, along with Chief Machinist Carl Petersen, who joined the Americans at the U.S. legation.

On 4 June, the trains of the Beijing–Tianjin railroad ceased running.²⁸ The strength of the legation guard at the start of the coming siege would be 407 officers and enlisted men from eight nations: 56 Americans, 82 British, 81 Russians, 51 Germans, 48 French, 35 Austrians, 29 Italians, and 25 Japanese.²⁹

Cut off from supplies, the Americans would begin playing a delicate game of driving away thousands of Boxers while conserving their less than 30,000 rounds of precious ammunition. Without their personal belongings, they lacked proper clothing and shoes, and the five days' rations they had packed were, of course, laughably insufficient. If a man wanted food in his belly, he would need to acquire a taste for racehorses.³⁰

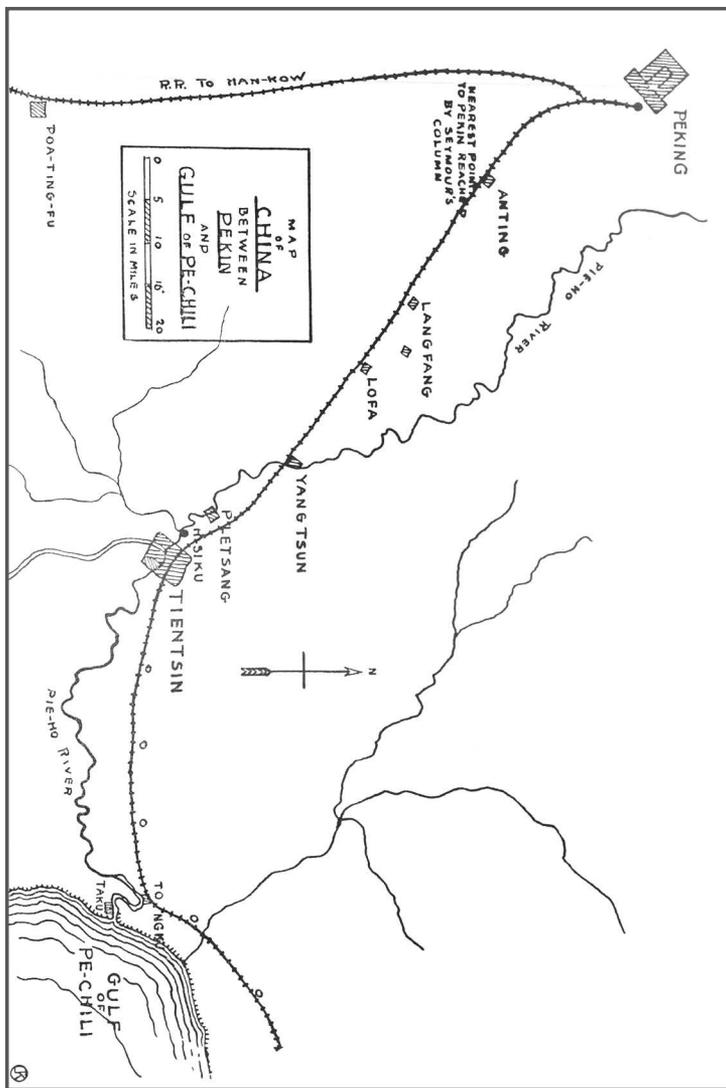
SEYMOUR EXPEDITION, JUNE 1900

On the morning of 9 June, U.S. minister Conger sent a telegram to Captain Bowman McCalla at Tianjin, requesting 25 additional marines to guard the U.S. legation. McCalla reacted by securing three crewed junks (Chinese sailing vessels) to transport the American force up the Hai River, in case the Tianjin–Beijing railroad was not an option. At 1800, another telegram arrived from Conger urging a relief force to start for the Legation Quarter.³¹

At 2100, the foreign consuls and naval commanders at Tianjin convened to discuss the situation in Beijing. The Russian commander opposed immediately relieving the legations, arguing at least 1,600 men were necessary to march on Beijing.³² McCalla lost his patience, stood up, and announced, “Gentlemen: there has been much talk without result. Now, I will state, that although I have but one hundred men, I intend to go to the assistance of my Minister.”³³ The British, Austrian, Italian, and Japanese commanders announced they would accompany the Americans.³⁴

The Americans under McCalla were primarily sailors from *Newark*. On 29 May, about 60 *Newark* bluejackets had disembarked at Dagu with their 3-inch field piece and packed into the lighter bound for Tianjin with Captain Myers’s detachments. As reports of Boxer violence increased, a second company of about 50 *Newark* bluejackets had arrived in Tianjin in early June on a train carrying 2,000 Qing imperial troops.³⁵ McCalla had exchanged polite greetings with the Chinese general on board and observed the Qing troops were “admirable from a physical point of view, neatly uniformed in blue, with straw hats,” and “well armed with either new Mauser or Mannlicher rifles.”³⁶ In his unpublished memoir, he confessed, “Their appearance and arms surprised me; for it was not then generally known that the Agents of many companies, in Europe and in the United States, had been for several years flooding China with modern munitions of war.”³⁷ This encounter would not be the last time McCalla realized he had underestimated the Chinese.

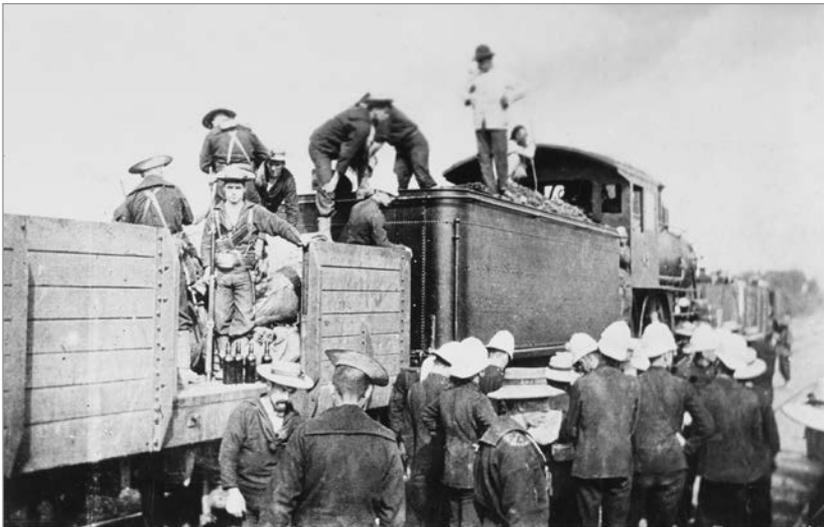
The allied commanders at Tianjin were prepared to seize a train if necessary, but the viceroy granted them permission to use the railway. Early on 10 June, Naval Cadet Joseph K. Taussig marched with his fellow *Newark* bluejackets to the Tianjin station, hoping to board the first train to Beijing.³⁸ Taussig had expected to find a train station of empty cars.



Map showing the Hai (Peiho) River and the Tianjin–Beijing (Tientsin–Peking) railroad line taken by the Seymour Expedition. (Joseph K. Taussig, “Experiences during the Boxer Rebellion,” *Proceedings* 53, no. 4 [April 1927]: 408, Navy Department Library [NDL], NHH, Washington, DC.)

Instead, he discovered two cars of about 800 British marines and bluejackets under Vice Admiral Sir Edward Seymour, commander in chief of the Royal Navy's China Station.³⁹ On 9 June, Seymour had received an urgent telegram from the British minister at the Legation Quarter: "Unless those at Peking were relieved soon, it would be too late."⁴⁰ He had responded immediately, departing Dagu with battalions from *Centurion*, *Endymion*, and *Aurora* to assemble an international relief force.⁴¹

Numbers vary slightly, but according to the Secretary of the Navy's report on the expedition, Seymour's expedition force totaled 2,066—915 British, 450 Germans, 312 Russians, 158 French, 54 Japanese, 40 Italians, 25 Austrians, and 112 Americans commanded by Captain McCalla.⁴²



Train belonging to the Seymour Expedition. (NHHC, USN-901029.)

The Secretary of the Navy's report also notes that Seymour's international relief column started out from Tianjin station promptly at 0930 local time on 10 June. However, in Taussig's account, McCalla insisted the British make room for the Americans in the first train, and got his way, but the squabble delayed the first train from leaving the station until early afternoon.⁴³

On board the first train with the Americans were the small Austrian and Italian contingents and half of the British. Three trains followed carrying the rest of the force. The fifth and final train, a supply train Seymour

planned to shuttle between his column and Tianjin, was under the command of *Newark's* paymaster, Henry E. Jewett.⁴⁴

That first day, the journey through the countryside was relatively smooth. At Yangcun (Yangtsun) station, the first train passed an encampment of Chinese troops under General Nie Shicheng (Nieh Shih-cheng), commander of the Guards Army's Front Division. The Guards Army was a corps of about 40,000 troops in five divisions under their commander in chief, General Ronglu (Jung-lu). A childhood friend of the empress dowager, Ronglu had organized the Guards Army into the most powerful Qing force in northern China. General Nie's Front Division of 10,000 men had received training by German instructors and was equipped with Mauser rifles, Maxim machine guns, and various artillery, but that day it did not put its Western tactics and technology to the test. The allies interpreted Nie's lack of interference as goodwill; after all, on 7 June, Nie had killed 100 Boxers sabotaging the Beijing–Tianjin railway. However, Nie had merely been taken by surprise. The Qing court had failed to inform him of the Seymour Expedition as the empress dowager hesitated over whether to engage the foreigners in all-out war. Still, Cixi had taken one swift and decisive action in response to the Seymour Expedition, replacing the pro-Western Prince Qing (Ching) with the pro-Boxer Prince Duan (Tuan) as head of the Zongli Yamen.⁴⁵

As the Qing court reorganized and reacted, the Seymour Expedition's peaceful train ride came to an end. Seven miles past Yangcun station, the allied forces encountered torn-up train tracks that required the troops to camp overnight as they made repairs. The sabotage was an organized effort by local landowner Ni Zanning, who had recruited 20,000 men to the Boxer cause. By dismantling the tracks, Ni aimed to slow the Seymour Expedition, setting it up for attacks by Boxers.⁴⁶

The British and the Americans repaired the railway. Sailors carried ties for several hundred yards, dug up the rocky rail bed to lay the ties, lifted the rails, put them in place, and drove the spikes. Taussig recorded in his diary that the sailors were "not very successful spike drivers,"⁴⁷ so this task was performed by one American coal passer who had worked as a section hand on a railroad. As track conditions worsened, the supply train brought rails, ties, spikes, fishplates, and around 100 Chinese

laborers with the skill to drive spikes.⁴⁸ “I doubt if a Naval force ever had to build a railroad before, and I also doubt if any force of equal size ever laid so much track per unit of time,” Taussig wrote.⁴⁹



Sailors and Chinese workers repair a railroad. (NHHC, USN-901032.)

On 11 June, the Americans were repairing track near Luofa (Lofa) station when a party of about 10 Boxers crept up on the train. A British patrol sounded the alarm. McCalla ordered the Americans to form a skirmish line and advance on the Boxers, who wore red caps, belts, and anklets, and carried white and red flags. The Boxers were armed with large knives or long spears, and they advanced slowly, making gestures they believed would protect them from bullets. Under the fire of 200 allied guns at a 200-yard range, every Boxer was shot in the span of a few minutes.

As evening neared, the column reached Luofa station, a watering stop for steam engines about 35 miles beyond Tianjin. The allies needed to replenish their engines' boilers, but Boxers had demolished the station's water works, so they turned to the nearby wells, which had broken pumps courtesy of the Boxers and little water due to the prolonged drought. The tender of the first train required 4,500 gallons, and though the Americans

had spent all day repairing tracks, they now formed a 30-yard-long bucket line and, for six hours, passed buckets until the tender was filled sometime near midnight. The dry weather, coupled with the manual labor, meant the men needed more water to drink than the limit of one canteen per day. They worried Boxers had poisoned the wells, but after the Chinese laborers drank from them without perishing, the Americans followed suit.

Before the night's end, Admiral Seymour held a meeting of the officers. The day's small-scale Boxer attack had alerted him to the need to prepare for larger attacks. The officers agreed that the most senior officer in each train, regardless of nationality, would be its commander. Captain McCalla became the commander of the first train, which had earned the nickname "construction train." The allies camped overnight at Luofa station, and though the night was cold, the men from *Newark* had both rubber and woolen blankets to keep them warm. The next day, the trains departed for Langfang station, about five miles along the line, leaving behind 100 men from HMS *Endymion* as a garrison. They painted "Fort Endymion" in large letters on Luofa station's walls.⁵⁰

Like Luofa station, Langfang station was in a state of disrepair. The building had been burned, the water works destroyed, and the tracks torn up for a mile, requiring three to four days' labor to repair. The men of McCalla's construction train got to work, some at Langfang, and some two miles ahead at another stretch of track. Naval Cadet Taussig was in the party sent ahead, and so, to his immense disappointment, he missed the fight at Langfang.⁵¹

It began at 1000 on 14 June when between 400 and 500 Boxers armed with swords and spears exploded from the nearby village and orchard field. Five Italians had ventured beyond the line of allied sentries to forage in the village. They tried to run. But this time, the Boxers had abandoned their rituals in favor of speed. They chased the Italians along the tracks, cutting them down, then charged at the trains, nearly reaching them by the time the allies fired the first shots.⁵² Captain McCalla was conversing in the construction train when he heard the commotion. Through the train car window, he saw the "wedge-like column" led by a Boxer wielding a two-handed sword.⁵³ Grabbing a rifle from one of his men, he jumped from the car and began firing. The Boxer leader turned, charging at

McCalla. A sailor attempted to haul his captain to safety, but McCalla extricated himself, ordered the sailor to fire, and aimed his own rifle at the Boxer leader. He was 30 yards away, but two shots from McCalla brought him down.⁵⁴ The British Maxim gun, firing at the head of the train, forced the Boxers to flee. They left behind 102 dead, shedding every unnecessary object so their allied pursuers could not catch them. The allies' only casualties were the five Italians.⁵⁵

In the aftermath, the allies collected Boxer knives, spears, and banners as souvenirs. One banner taken from a dead Boxer read "Death to all foreigners: by order of the Government."⁵⁶ The allies dismissed the claim of Qing government support as a Boxer scheme to gin up new recruits.⁵⁷

Repairing the railway all the way to Beijing risked the Seymour Expedition arriving too late to relieve the Legation Quarter. The allies devised a new plan: ride to Anting station, 15 miles ahead and 25 miles from Beijing, then make a forced night march the rest of the way to the capital.⁵⁸ Under McCalla, the construction train left the main body at Langfang to begin repairs farther along the line, burning every village that showed signs of a Boxer presence and commandeering mules, horses, and carts for the march.⁵⁹

On 16 June, McCalla's construction train was repairing track at a point only three miles from Anting station when orders arrived from Seymour to fall back. The day before, Seymour had sent his supply train to Tianjin, but the train had returned with bad news: the railroad that the allied forces had painstakingly repaired near Yangcun was in ruins, effectively cutting their line of supply and communication with Tianjin.⁶⁰ McCalla's construction train returned to Yangcun and confronted track torn up "as far as they could see."⁶¹ General Nie's troops, who had been encamped by the railroad at Yangcun, had disappeared. Now, Taussig wrote, "There was no doubting the fact that the Imperial Troops had stopped protecting the road, and it looked as if they were the ones who had destroyed it."⁶²

Taussig was at least partly correct: General Nie was no longer defending the railroad from Boxers. Nie had received imperial orders to station his troops along the rail line near Tianjin and prevent the foreigners from reaching Beijing, or else he would be held personally responsible.

The Guards Army and the Boxers now shared a goal: stopping the Seymour Expedition from reaching Beijing. However, General Nie had inflicted heavy casualties on the Boxers in the spring and could not expect their support. Luckily for the Qing empire, the commander of the Guards Army's Rear Division, General Dong Fuxiang (Tung Fu-hsiang), had a fiercely antiforeign reputation that perfectly situated him to form an alliance with the Boxers. Although himself a Muslim, Dong had been recruited by the Qing government to suppress a Muslim rebellion in Gansu Province in 1894–95. Dong's 10,000-strong Rear Division, formerly known as the Gansu Army, was primarily composed of Muslims from Gansu Province, formidable fighters devoutly loyal to the Qing government. General Dong was occupied with building ramparts outside the capital, but he sent one of his top units under Colonel Yao Wang to join Boxer leader Ni Zanqing.⁶³

Seymour's column was dangerously spread out. McCalla's construction train was near Yangcun, the British "Fort Endymion" garrison was at Luofa, the main body of the expedition was at Langfang, and a German garrison was at a coal depot near Langfang, christened "Fort Gefion" for their ship. Colonel Yao Wang and Ni Zanqing determined Fort Gefion was the weak point and amassed about 3,000 Qing soldiers and 2,000 Boxers for an attack.

On 18 June, Boxers charged at Fort Gefion, teenagers and old men alike barreling into heavy allied fire in never-ending waves. When the Boxers fell, Colonel Yao's soldiers attacked. Armed with modern weapons, they nearly forced the Germans' right flank to retreat. British and French sailors reinforced the Germans, driving back the Chinese forces. At the end of the battle, the allied casualties were 10 dead and 50 wounded. The Chinese death toll was 400, over half of the casualties Qing soldiers.⁶⁴

The Seymour Expedition, originally 2,066 strong, now had 230 wounded. A train ride that would have only taken three hours in more peaceful times had stretched out to nine days.⁶⁵ Faced with 30,000 imperial soldiers and countless Boxers in the direction of Beijing, Seymour accepted the necessity of a retreat to Tianjin. In this direction, the risk was General Nie's 10,000 troops. The allied trains trundled to join the

construction train near Yangcun, carrying the wounded and dead from Langfang.

At Yangcun, the allies set fire to their trains. The Germans commandeered several large junks to transport the wounded and supplies, and the Americans seized several smaller boats for knapsacks, haversacks, and blankets. The river was low due to the drought, so the officers had to jettison heavy guns and equipment and tow the junks from shore. The expedition's only remaining artillery were the Americans' 3-inch field piece and two British 9-pounders.

The Americans formed the advanced guard of the retreat and set out along the left bank of the Hai River at noon on 19 June. Three U.S. Marine sharpshooters led the way, followed by 10 marines in support, then a reserve of 20 men under Naval Cadet Taussig, and finally, the main body hauling the field piece. Each section was spaced at a distance of 100 yards. Captain McCalla rode on a white donkey, and every bluejacket carried 180 rounds of ammunition in his belt and 70 rounds in a haversack stuffed with hard tack and canned goods. Occasionally, McCalla's donkey would kneel on the road, and he would join the rest of his force on foot.⁶⁶

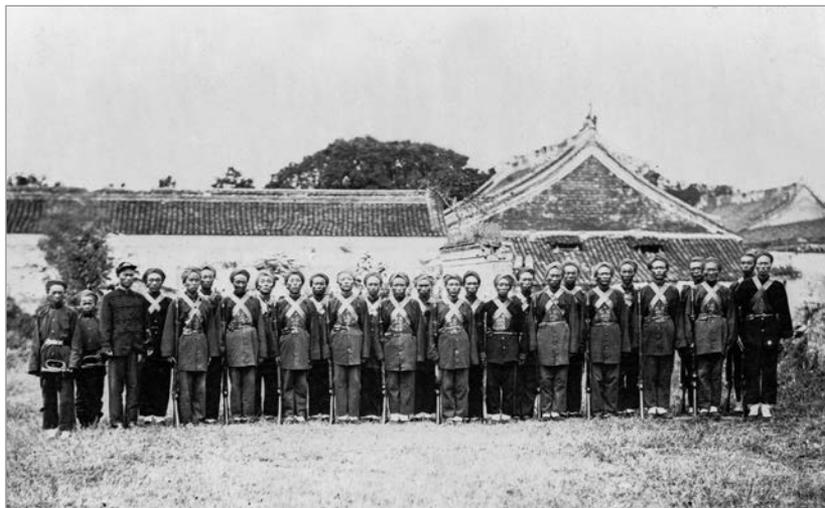
The entire allied column was delayed on the first day, only covering a few miles due to the junks running aground. Progress improved the second day—that is, until the allies encountered 200 Boxers. The Boxers fled when the Americans' field piece fired, but continued to harass the allies by sniping from the mud walls of houses and from any of the thousands of grave mounds dotting the flat fields of the Chinese countryside. To their traditional arsenal of spears and swords, the Boxers had added 30–40 rifles, and two jingals, large muskets that fired bolt nuts.⁶⁷

At each village, the Americans formed a skirmish line and charged, only to find the Boxers had already retreated to the next settlement along the Hai River. Late in the afternoon, the allies reached a village where they heard a volley of hundreds of rifles. The British, French, and Japanese bolstered the American skirmish line, and all three pieces of allied artillery fired. When the volleys continued, the Germans took up position in the rear, firing over the skirmish line. One German bullet struck a U.S. Marine in the back. As the marine was carried to the rear, he shouted, "Hey, fellows, here goes a dead marine killed by a damned Dutchman."⁶⁸

Then, the Japanese captain realized the cause of the noise: firecrackers. The allies fixed their bayonets and charged on the village, finding not one Boxer hiding among the homes.

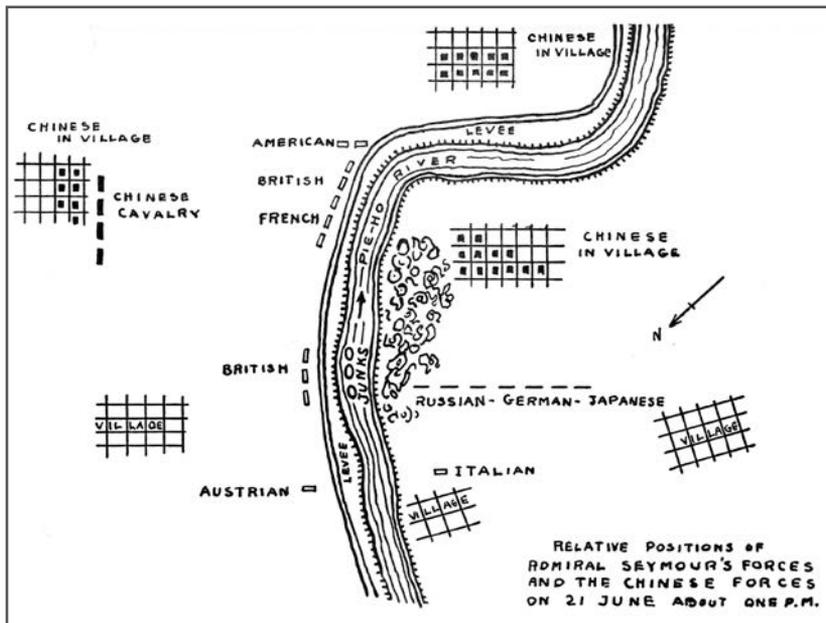
As fatigue set in, Seymour sent a message suggesting the allies make camp for the night, but McCalla insisted they push on. Reflecting on the expedition later, Taussig wrote, “This continued urge to *push on* saved us at least one full day in our finally reaching safety; and this one day might well have been all that stood between us and annihilation.”⁶⁹ That day, the allies covered nine miles. When they did stop to rest between two villages, they set both on fire.⁷⁰

On 21 June, the allies neared the village of Beicang (Peitsang), which occupied both banks of the Hai (Peiho) River. On the left bank, the Americans, British, and French advanced with the Austrians guarding the rear. On the right, the Russians, Germans, and Japanese marched with the Italians as rear guard. Field pieces firing shrapnel shells welcomed the allies to Beicang, and tipped them off to the presence of imperial soldiers. These soldiers belonged to an elite unit of the Front Division personally commanded by General Nie. By Taussig’s estimate, the Chinese troops outnumbered the allies three to one.⁷¹



Chinese soldiers who opposed the Seymour Expedition. (LC, LC-USZ62-108166.)

Keeping close to the river and sheltering behind houses, the allies advanced in the face of heavy enemy fire, which mostly flew over their heads. The Chinese retreated to 500 yards beyond the city's edge, where they made a stand from a mud wall that held the allies in place. The allies closed the distance in increments of 50 yards, driving the Chinese back to another mud wall and occupying the one they had abandoned. Over the course of two hours, the allies covered two miles by advancing from mud wall to mud wall in quick rushes with fixed bayonets.⁷² Taussig's skirmish line was an indiscriminate mix of Americans, British, and French. Much to his chagrin, the French often ignored his orders to cease firing, preferring to "shoot as rapidly as possible, whether [there] was anything to shoot at or not."⁷³ Once, as Taussig mounted a mud wall to signal a cease-fire, a Frenchman shot his rifle between the naval cadet's legs. Taussig cursed the Frenchman in English, which the man probably did not understand.⁷⁴



Map showing the positions of the allied forces and General Nie's Front Division at Beicang at around 1300 on 21 June. (Taussig, "Experiences during the Boxer Rebellion," 417, NDL, NHHC.)

As they pressed on, Taussig saw Captain McCalla “here, there, and everywhere” on his white donkey.⁷⁵ He noticed that where McCalla went, the Chinese bullets followed. Years later, he recalled sharing the observation with his captain:

“Captain,” I said. “They are using you for a target!” And his iconic reply was: “Now, don’t mind me, don’t mind me,” and moved on. But he seemed to have a charmed life as evidenced by the fact that one bullet passed through his hand, one hit his sword scabbard, and one grazed across his back.⁷⁶

Suddenly, the Chinese firing ceased. The allies followed a road on top of a river levee, which turned sharply to the right, onto a large village from which the Chinese made a determined stand. Three hundred Chinese cavalry appeared on the allies’ left flank, firing from a distance, their bullets falling short. The Americans deployed their 3-inch field piece. Its first shot caused the cavalry to split, and the second and third caused them to flee.



American and British contingents deployed behind an embankment while under fire from artillery during the Seymour Expedition’s retreat. The junk on the right carries the wounded and supplies. (NHHC, NH-2844.)

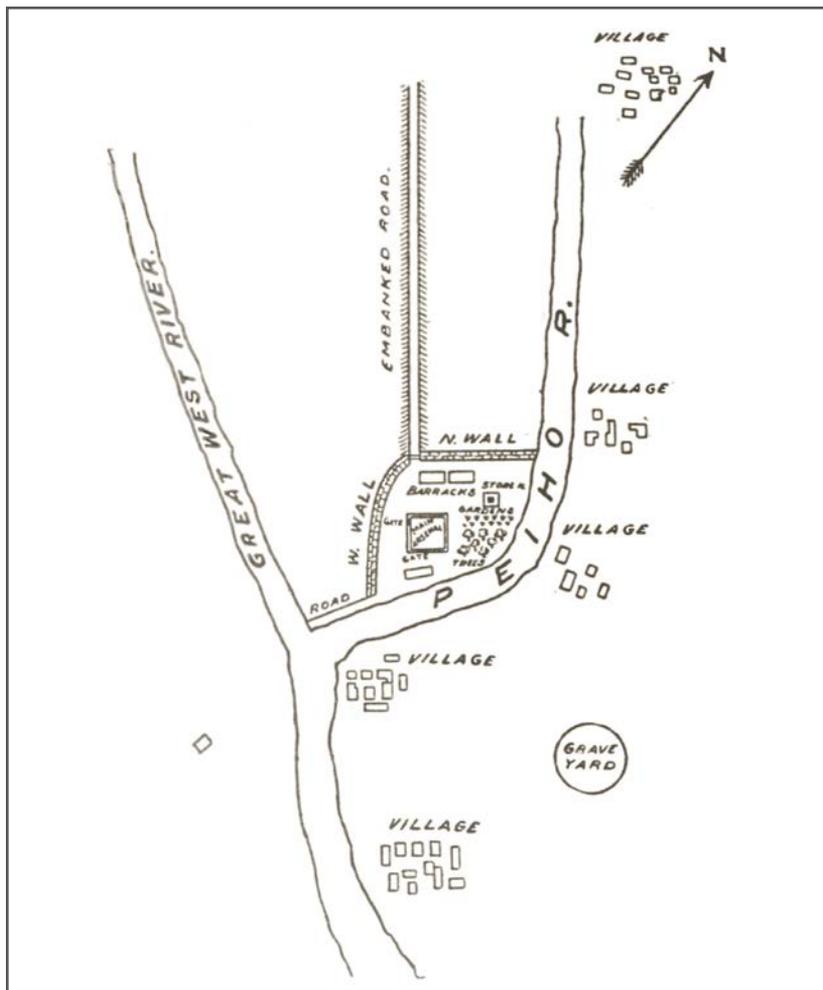
If the Americans continued along the levee road, they would be directly exposed to fire from the village ahead. They decided to cross the levee to the riverbank, where there would be cover. However, the Russians, Germans, and Japanese on the right side of the river did not advance as quickly as the allies did on the left. Thus, when Taussig reached the top of the levee, he was exposed to Chinese fire from both riverbanks. A blow to his right hip knocked him over. He slid down the bank, where he lay until a British lieutenant and a few bluejackets carried him to a depression in the ground.

More bodies, most wounded and several dead, joined Taussig in the depression. Once the allies had driven off the Chinese, the dead were buried and the wounded carried on stretchers to the junks. Taussig was placed atop boxes of canned goods, so he had to be moved quite frequently. As the Americans had no doctor—*Newark's* senior surgeon was ill on the ship and Assistant Surgeon Lippitt was besieged in Beijing—a British doctor set Taussig's broken leg, wrapped it in a bandage, and injected him with morphine.

Chinese attacks resumed the next morning as the column struggled onward. The Americans' 3-inch field piece was abandoned, all its ammunition used up. The junk ahead of Taussig's was peppered by bullets, which struck some of the wounded. Then, the junk was sunk by a shell. The injured men and supplies had to be crowded onto the remaining junks.⁷⁷

At 0100 on 23 June, the allies broke camp, daring a nighttime march to sneak past the Chinese troops. Their fate looked bleak, as they did not have the ammunition to sustain a full day of fighting, but they did not discuss surrender. If necessary, they would "fight to the last with the bayonet."⁷⁸ At around 0400, as day broke, Ensign Daniel Wurtsbaugh and Paymaster Jewett happened upon a Chinese sentry patrolling the opposite bank of the Hai River. Admiral Seymour and Captain McCalla arrived with an interpreter, who asked if the allies could pass in peace. The Chinese replied with shellfire. Bells, bugles, and gongs summoned Chinese soldiers to engage the allies. At 0800, while the main body of the Seymour Expedition returned fire, a party of 200 British marines crossed the river and attacked the enemy flank, surprising the troops into flight. On the opposite bank, the allies discovered the Xigu (Hsiku) Arsenal, an

enormous fortified compound that saved the expedition from annihilation. The Americans had only 25 rounds left per man, more than any other nation represented.⁷⁹



Map of the walled Xigu Arsenal. (Daniel W. Wurtsbaugh, "The Seymour Relief Expedition," *Proceedings* 28, no. 2 [April 1902]: 217.)

Inside the arsenal, Taussig wrote, "There were stacks and stacks of modern rifles—Winchesters, Mausers and Mannlichers; and hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition. There were field guns and siege guns

by the score. That this place was so easily taken seemed a miracle. It was our salvation."⁸⁰ McCalla estimated the arsenal's munitions to be worth at least one million pounds sterling and marveled that not one foreigner had known of its existence. The allies found enough rice to last two weeks, and set about fortifying the arsenal against General Nie's imperial troops, who kept up a continuous bombardment of shrapnel.⁸¹

Now, the allies' last order of business was to communicate with the foreigners in Tianjin. A Chinese servant traveling with the expedition volunteered to deliver a message. He survived the Boxers and imperial troops, but upon reaching Tianjin's foreign settlement, he was killed by an allied soldier. In another attempt to get a message out, a detachment of British marines crept from the arsenal under the cover of night but sustained four casualties in hard fighting before falling back. Finally, a second Chinese servant, Chao Yin-Ho, took on the task. Chao swam the Hai River and talked his way out of captivity by Boxers and by imperial soldiers, both times while tied to a tree. When he arrived at the foreign concessions at Tianjin, he dodged fire from French sentries until he gained entry by making hand signals.⁸² The next day, 25 June, Chao led allied troops to the Xigu Arsenal to escort Seymour and his men to Tianjin.⁸³

Since the Hai River flowed through the Chinese-held city of Tianjin, the Seymour Expedition and its rescue party could not follow its banks to the foreign concessions, which lay outside the city walls. Their route overland necessitated that 180 wounded be carried on stretchers. As each stretcher required six men—four to carry and two for relief—nearly the entire Seymour Expedition carried stretchers while the rescue party was responsible for defense. Luckily, the Chinese made no attacks. Behind the allies, plumes of smoke rose and explosions sounded from the Xigu Arsenal burning to the ground.⁸⁴

Casualties for the Seymour Expedition amounted to 62 killed and 232 wounded, with the Americans sustaining losses of 4 killed and 28 wounded⁸⁵—the highest casualties by percentage of any nation present.⁸⁶ Naval Cadet Joseph Taussig, who had been shot through the thigh, was carried from the Xigu Arsenal on a stretcher. Captain Bowman McCalla, who had been struck in the foot by shrapnel and in the back by buckshot, rode into Tianjin's foreign concessions on his donkey.⁸⁷ On 30 June, a tug

transported McCalla and his bluejackets down the Hai River to *Monocacy*. The next day, McCalla rejoined *Newark* after what he described as “a most eventful and interesting absence.”⁸⁸



Chao Yin-Ho, the Seymour Expedition's savior.
(NHHC, NH-1400.)

Despite the expedition's failure, Seymour lauded McCalla and the Americans in a letter to a senior U.S. naval officer at Dagu: “Their post was usually in the advanced guard, where their zeal and go [were] praised by all. I regret to state that Captain McCalla was wounded in three places, but considering the gallant way in which he exposed himself I am only equally surprised and thankful that he is alive.”⁸⁹

BATTLE OF THE DAGU FORTS, 17 JUNE 1900

The four Dagu Forts occupied critical positions at the mouth of the Hai River, which flowed to the city of Tianjin. If they so desired, Chinese troops in the forts could cut off communication between the foreign navies at Dagu and their compatriots inland. When Royal Navy rear admiral James Bruce received reports the Chinese planned to send additional troops to the forts and mine the Hai River, he decided to act. He met with the allied naval commanders off Dagu, and they agreed to send an ultimatum to the Chinese commander: surrender the Dagu Forts by 0200 local time on 17 June, or else they would be taken by force.⁹⁰

The only allied commander not in agreement was U.S. Navy rear admiral Louis Kempff. Kempff believed seizing the forts went against U.S. policy to avoid foreign entanglements and would endanger foreigners in the interior of China.⁹¹ Thus, he sent handwritten orders to Commander Frederick Wise of *Monocacy* not to act unless “directly attacked.”⁹² As *Monocacy* did not intend to join the fight, the ship remained moored by the Tanggu railroad station, one and a half miles from the forts (see Dagu Forts map), and took on board 37 foreign refugees.⁹³



Inside of a fort at Dagu. (Smith, *China in Convulsion*, 1:19.)

According to Navy reports, the Chinese began shelling the allied fleet at 0045, more than an hour before the 0200 deadline. The allied ships returned a heavy fire. Shells passed near *Monocacy*, bursting short of and beyond the sidewheel gunboat. At 0230, Commander Wise was standing atop *Monocacy*'s pilothouse when he heard a shell approaching. It crashed through the ship without exploding, throwing up splinters but claiming no casualties. As the shells bursting near *Monocacy* increased, Wise reasoned the Chinese were aiming at allied troops encamped at the railroad station and, around 0400, moved his gunboat upriver.⁹⁴ Steaming from the battle, he felt "a natural regret . . . that duty and orders prevented the old *Monocacy* from giving her ancient smooth bores a last chance."⁹⁵

At 0430, an allied land force of about 900 men attempted to take the forts but was repulsed. Royal Navy ships *Algerine* and *Iltis* steamed within 200 yards of the northwest fort, firing a barrage that suppressed Chinese fire. The land force seized the northwest fort, and then turned its guns on the remaining forts. A shot from *Algerine* exploded the main magazine of one of the south forts, obliterating the Chinese resistance. The battle of the Dagu Forts concluded by 0700, leaving the allied commanders victorious. *Iltis* was struck 27 times, its losses second only to the Russian gunboat *Gilyak*, which sank in shallow water when a shell caused an explosion that killed or wounded 67 men.⁹⁶

More than 55 miles inland, near Yangcun, *Newark* bluejackets standing guard for the Seymour Expedition reported the booming of heavy guns to the south, but their superiors believed they had mistaken thunder for the sound of cannons.⁹⁷ When Kempff's telegram reporting the battle reached Washington, the Navy Department inquired why "*Monocacy* should be fired upon without resistance."⁹⁸ Kempff clarified, "*Monocacy* did not return fire of forts because Commander Wise did not interpret my written orders of 15th of June as I intended them. I instructed make war in return if directly attacked. Commander Wise did not consider that he was directly attacked, as the firing was at night and wild."⁹⁹ In the aftermath, Kempff declared the Chinese firing at *Monocacy* an "act of war," as the Chinese "must have known of her presence."¹⁰⁰ "It is now necessary to join with the other foreign powers for common defense and preservation

of foreign people and the honor of our country,” he wrote to the Secretary of the Navy.¹⁰¹

News of the Chinese defeat did not arrive at the Qing court for several days, but when it did, the empress dowager was furious. For Cixi, the capture of the forts evoked memories of the Second Opium War, when an Anglo-French army had seized the forts, forcing her to flee with her husband, who had perished outside the Great Wall of China. When Cixi had returned to Beijing, she had found her beloved Old Summer Palace burned. This time, Cixi would not flee. She would fight.¹⁰²

However, not all members of the Qing imperial court favored war. Ronglu, the commander in chief of the Guards Army, believed that antagonizing eight of the world’s most powerful nations was a fool’s errand. In May, as the international guard reached the Beijing Legation Quarter, Ronglu had written the first of seven memoranda to the throne pushing for the continuation of the Boxer suppression campaign. Otherwise, he argued, more foreign troops would arrive in Beijing, a far greater threat to the Qing empire than the Boxers. In fact, Ronglu had intentionally failed to inform General Nie of a 3 June imperial decree ordering a stop to the Boxer suppression campaign, allowing Nie to kill Boxers and anger the court.¹⁰³

Despite his strong opinions, Ronglu never openly supported Prince Qing’s moderate anti-Boxer faction. He may have feared the foreigners, but he also feared opposing the empress dowager outright. After all, his intimate relationship with the empress was the reason for his impressive political and military career.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Ronglu’s modus operandi was “timid conformity” and secret defiance.¹⁰⁵

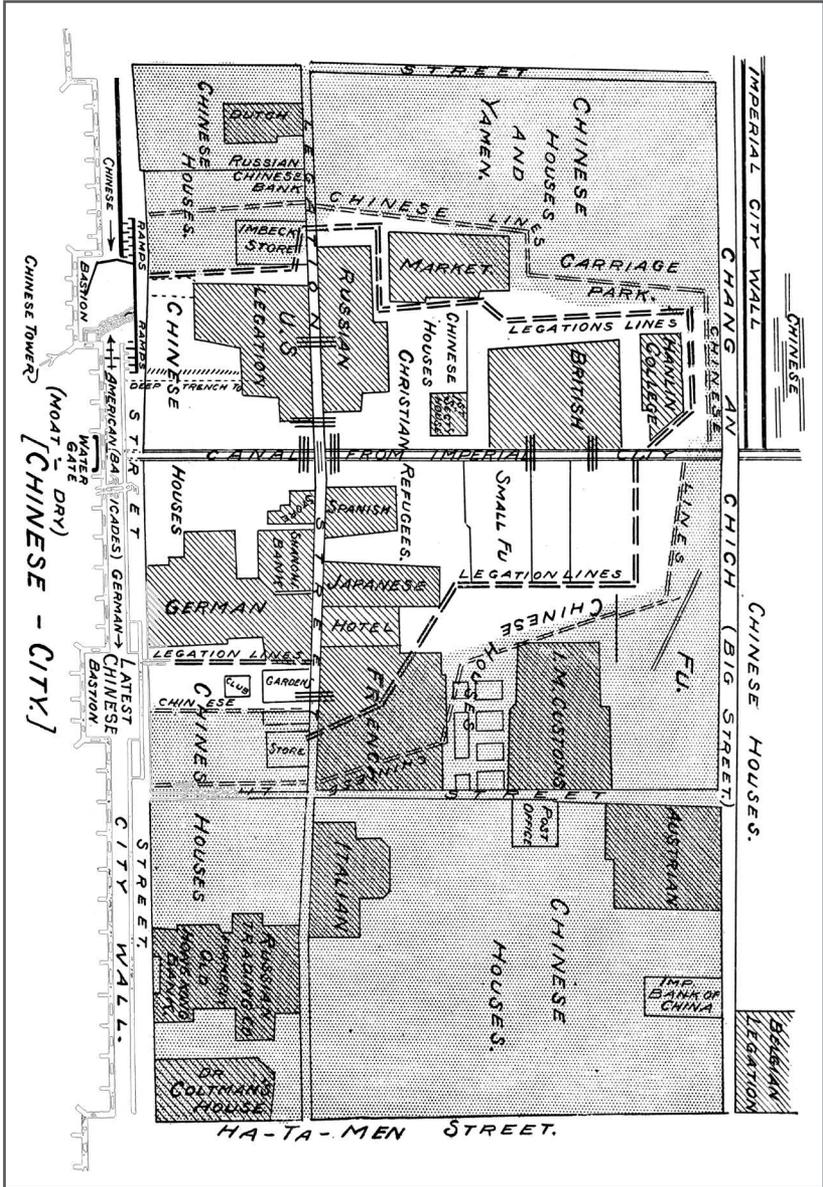
On 21 June, Cixi issued an official declaration of war. The Boxers were recognized under the law and organized under the Qing court’s pro-Boxer princes. Prince Duan, head of the Zongli Yamen and leader of the court’s conservative faction, was placed in charge of the approximately a quarter of a million Boxers in Beijing, formed into 1,400 leagues of 200 members each. Along the road to Beijing, more than 100,000 Boxers were stationed alongside the Chinese army.¹⁰⁶ Now, the only path left for the allied nations to relieve the Legation Quarter was war.

SIEGE OF THE LEGATIONS, JUNE–AUGUST 1900

At around 2100 on 31 May, Captain John T. Myers and his American guard of 49 marines and 5 sailors had arrived at the U.S. legation to a blinding flash of light and a puff of smoke—a guest of the American minister Edwin Conger taking a photograph. The U.S. legation was a rectangular compound “bounded on the north and east by Chinese shops and houses, on the west by Legation Street and on the south by Imbeck’s stores, low, rambling buildings.” The guard’s quarters were in the rear of a Russian-Chinese bank and Imbeck’s store. Myers observed that the defense situation “was not a promising one” and set about establishing a main guard at the U.S. legation gate and sentries at various points on the grounds. Outside the gate, “a Chinese guard of boy soldiers armed with fans and spears were supposed to protect the legation; these vanished when the first shots were fired.”¹⁰⁷

The first several days at the Legation Quarter were uneventful. But, on 6 June, when Boxers burned several railroad stations, Myers wired Captain Bowman McCalla, requesting 25 additional men to protect the U.S. legation. On 7 June, the British marine officer present, at Myers’s request, called a meeting of the officers at the legations to adopt a defense plan. They decided that in the event of an attack, all noncombatants and provisions would be sent to the British legation, streets leading to the legations would be barricaded, and Chinese would not be allowed to enter without a pass. They also agreed to “endeavor to hold all the legations as long as possible, and as a last resort, to fall back upon the English legation.”¹⁰⁸

At around noon on 11 June, Japanese chancellor Sugiyama Akira went to the train station to await the ill-fated Seymour Expedition. The allied forces never arrived, and when Sugiyama refused to yield the right of way by moving his cart, he was brutally murdered by men of General Dong Fuxiang’s Gansu cavalry, stationed to prevent the arrival of foreign troops. Ronglu quickly assuaged the situation by making a trip to the Japanese legation to apologize. Ronglu and Dong Fuxiang were sworn blood brothers—a Chinese tradition—but now Ronglu began to question if Dong and his Gansu soldiers could be controlled.¹⁰⁹



Map of the Legation Quarter in Beijing by Captain John T. Myers. (John T. Myers, "Military Operations and Defenses of the Siege of Peking," *Proceedings* 28, no. 3 [September 1902]: map insert, ND, NHHHC.)

On 13 June, two Boxers dressed in full regalia and carrying un-sheathed swords appeared on Legation Street, followed by a large crowd. The German minister, Baron Clemens von Ketteler, led German sentries in a chase after the Boxers. One Boxer was captured, the other escaped. When the crowd gathered in front of the U.S. legation, the Americans fired their Colt machine gun to disperse it.



Punishment of a Boxer prisoner, Beijing, c. 1900. (LC, LC-USZ62-137105.)

That evening at 1700, Boxers set fire to the outside chapel of a Methodist mission. The mission lay three-quarters of a mile east of the Legation Quarter and housed American missionaries and Chinese Christian refugees. It was protected by barbed wire entanglements, earthworks, and trenches built by the marines. Captain Myers, at the request of Minister Conger, had sent Corporal Martin Hunt and 10 men to the

mission on 8 June, followed by 10 more men under Captain Newt Hall on 9 June. In answering to Conger, Myers had deviated from orders by his superior, Captain McCalla, to never divide his force. The American guard drove back the crowd that had gathered at the burning mission with bayonets, but the chapel had been destroyed.¹¹⁰



Private Albert G. Turner stands guard at the Methodist mission. (Oscar J. Upham, folder 11: Photographs, Personal Papers Collection, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.)

Back in the Legation Quarter, the allies obtained permission from the Zongli Yamen to clear the streets and build barricades. The Chinese foreign affairs office provided proclamations to post on the barricades that demanded respect from the Chinese populace. The initial barricades consisted of overturned carts. Gaps were filled with planks, beams torn from Chinese houses, and other odds and ends. Later, as Chinese rifle fire flew from all directions, the barricades would be strengthened with bricks,

beams, and stone, and “built double” so its guards were protected to the front and rear.¹¹¹

Since the Russian and U.S. legations faced each other across Legation Street, the Americans and Russians worked together to build the barricade joining the two compounds. Communication between the nations occurred through hand gestures, and through the Russian commander, who spoke limited English. The international alliance was strengthened by the American officers partaking in the “ever-burning samovar in the Russian Legation, ready to make tea ‘at all hours.’”¹¹²



Gateway to the U.S. legation protected by the Legation Street barricade. (Upham, folder 11, Personal Papers Collection.)

As night fell on the newly built barricades, Boxers burned the outlying missions and churches in Beijing, sparing the Beitang (Peitang) Cathedral. Thirty-one French and 12 Italian marines would defend the Gothic church and its Catholic priests and nuns against 10,000 Boxers under Prince Duan until 16 August, when they were rescued by Japanese troops.¹¹³

On the morning of 14 June, badly burned Chinese Christians appeared at the barricades to the Legation Quarter. They were allowed entrance, treated by Assistant Surgeon Lippitt and the Russian surgeon, and sent to the French legation. A Russian officer decided to send a search party to rescue Chinese Christians trapped in the city's burning districts. Myers supported the effort with a party of 10 Americans led by diplomat William Pethick. The rescuers returned to the Legation Quarter with about 150 Chinese Christians. That night, the allies inside the legations went to sleep to cries outside their barricades of "*Sha! Sha!*" — "*Kill! Kill!*"¹¹⁴



Beitang Cathedral, Beijing, c. 1900. The site of a second siege in Beijing. (LC, LC-DIG-stereo-1s19545.)

On 15 June, a rescue party of British and American troops, including Assistant Surgeon Lippitt, failed to find more Chinese Christians, but came across a meeting of Boxers in a temple. The allies, bolstered by Japanese and Austrian troops, surrounded the temple and killed 45 Boxers.¹¹⁵

Captain Myers observed that the allied rescue missions “served to inflame the Boxer element more deeply against the foreigners,” and indeed, the flames of the Boxers’ rage spread throughout the city.¹¹⁶ On 16 June, Boxers burned down a British drug store, setting off a chemical explosion that tore through Beijing’s busiest commercial district. Foreign hospitals and dispensaries were often the kindling for fires, as Boxers viewed Western medical practices with suspicion. The following day, a Boxer started a fire only half a mile west of the legation barricades, which took the allies and municipal fire department two hours to put out.¹¹⁷



Marines returning to the Methodist mission after clearing a street of Boxers. (Upham, folder 11, Personal Papers Collection.)

The day of 18 June spelled misfortune for the legation guard, and for the Seymour Expedition, which was busy fighting the combined force of Boxers and imperial soldiers at Langfang. In retaliation for the allies’ ultimatum to turn over the Dagou Forts, the Zongli Yamen informed the

ministers that a state of war existed. They had 24 hours to leave the Legation Quarter with protection guaranteed until they reached Tianjin.

The foreign ministers were skeptical of this offer for protection. The British minister MacDonald believed that once they left the safety of the Legation Quarter they would be slaughtered, like the besieged Westerners at Cawnpore, India, during the Sepoy Rebellion.¹¹⁸ Ultimately, the ministers agreed to cooperate with the empress dowager's ultimatum, but requested a meeting with the Zongli Yamen on the morning of 20 June to discuss their safe passage. When the foreign missionaries pressed the ministers on what would become of the 2,000 Chinese Christian refugees living within the Legation Quarter, the ministers replied that their primary responsibility was to their compatriots, especially the women and children.¹¹⁹

The morning came and, with it, no response from the Zongli Yamen. Impatient, the German minister Baron Clemens von Ketteler set out with his interpreter to visit the offices of the Zongli Yamen, a decision that would alter the course of history. On the journey from the Legation Quarter to Hatamen Street, an imperial soldier fired a fatal shot into the German minister's back.¹²⁰ Von Ketteler's interpreter sustained a leg wound, but escaped and sought refuge at the Methodist mission.¹²¹

When the Germans learned of their fallen minister, they sent a detachment to recover his body, but gunfire forced them to return to the legations. A safe journey from Beijing to Tianjin was no longer an option. The allies resorted to their defense plan, sending women and children to the British legation along with a guard of 10 men from each allied nation. Three meals per day had been provided to the American guard by a Chinese man at a rate of 75 cents per person, but now, as the siege began, two European stores within allied lines were emptied of their supplies, along with rice and wheat from the Chinese shops. The gathered food was sent to the British legation, and the Chinese man remained at the legations to cook the rations.¹²² All the horses, mules, and racing ponies were sent to the British stables, "where they were fattened for the fate which eventually befell all except about ten out of some hundred which had been driven in."¹²³ Myers would later write, "It was not amiss during the siege to ask if 'the horse had been curried,' and in this form they proved most

acceptable.”¹²⁴ Myers himself led 15 American, 10 Russian, and 10 British troops to escort Captain Newt Hall and his men, who had guarded the Methodist mission, into the relative safety of the legations. Myers’s timing was impeccable, as the mission would burn down the next day. That evening, the Legation Quarter was fired on from all sides and spies reported Boxers were entering the city and moving freely among the imperial troops. According to Captain Myers, “They appeared to be on the best of terms.”¹²⁵

On 22 June, miscommunication may have led to misfortune. Almost all the legation guard retreated to the British legation under the orders of an Austrian captain. A report by G. E. Morison, the *Times* (UK) correspondent at Beijing, blames “an irresponsible American” who had told the Austrian captain that the U.S. legation had been abandoned.¹²⁶ A firsthand account by British civilian Nigel Oliphant tells that the miscommunication prompted a meeting of the ministers, who chose British minister Sir Claude MacDonald as commander of the legations. MacDonald then ordered the guards to retake their positions, but for the Italians and the Austrians it was too late.¹²⁷ Their legations were already burning. Oliphant’s account of 22 June conflicts with Captain Myers’s report. While Myers recorded a “misunderstanding of orders,” he wrote, “The mistake being quickly discovered, our positions were at once reoccupied before the Chinese knew of our absence.”¹²⁸ In Myers’s account, the meeting of ministers to appoint MacDonald occurred a day prior to the miscommunication, on 21 June, and the Austrian legation did not burn down until 23 June.¹²⁹

One thing is certain: the legations were burning. On 23 June, General Dong Fuxiang’s troops and Boxers looted and burned the Chinese shops and houses to the west of the Legation Quarter.¹³⁰ That same day, the Hanlin Academy, less than 15 feet from the north wall of the British legation, went up in flames. The inferno consumed the academy’s ancient library, home to a collection that rivaled the Great Library of Alexandria and included the only copy of the *Great Encyclopedia*, 22,000 reference books penned by over 2,000 Ming dynasty scholars.¹³¹ As the buildings bordering the allied lines turned to ash, the fate of the international guard rested on their ability to defend a single section of the Tartar Wall, 45 feet

high and 50 feet wide, bordering the German and U.S. legations. Crenellated parapets rose along the top of the wall and bastions jutted out at intervals of 100 yards. Two double ramps, one near the American legation, the other near the German legation, allowed the allies access to the top of the wall, where its width narrowed to 40 feet.¹³²

If Chinese forces occupied the section of the Tartar Wall near the Legation Quarter, they could fire directly onto the allies, and on 24 June they did just that. The Germans drove the Chinese back, and Myers and his men attempted to occupy the Tartar Wall, but heavy smoke and enemy gunfire hampered their efforts. The next day, the Americans and Germans each succeeded in seizing sections of the wall. The Germans held the eastern side, a position that pitted them against General Ronglu's Center Division. Guarding the western side of the Tartar Wall, the Americans faced General Dong Fuxiang's fiercely antiforeign Gansu soldiers.¹³³

The Americans built their barricade at the head of their double ramp on the near side of a bastion (see Legation Quarter map), working from a small barricade the Chinese had placed there. Later, Myers would consider building on the near side rather than the far side "a grave error."¹³⁴ Digging a shallow trench atop the wall required the removal of large bricks, which were stacked to construct the barricade, and arranged to leave narrow spaces, or loopholes, to fire through.¹³⁵ The loopholes proved a liability, as the Chinese soldiers could put "5 out of six shots through a loophole three inches square" without the aid of a field glass.¹³⁶ The Japanese peered through the loopholes using a small mirror tied to a stick. Meanwhile, a Russian blowing cigarette smoke through a loophole drew the attention of a Chinese soldier who shot him dead.¹³⁷

The tops of the Americans' brick barricades were piled with double layers of sandbags, filled instead with earth. One layer of bags was insufficient, an unfortunate fact confirmed on 30 June when a bullet passed through the single bag Private J. W. Tutcher was using to protect his head, blowing in his forehead.¹³⁸ The role of "earth-bag" making fell to the women, and, according to Myers, "helped to divert their minds from the possible results if the Chinese should get in."¹³⁹ Myers recalled, "Materials of all sorts were pressed into service for this purpose, and bags of gaudy satin laid side by side with those of sack-cloth."¹⁴⁰

The earth bag was not the only piece of allied innovation inspired by necessity. The Italians had a 1-pounder that had run out of shells, and the American Colt gun required too much of the limited ammunition supply. The Colt was consigned to the British legation as a “last resort in case of a charge en masse.”¹⁴¹ One of the bluejackets who had accompanied the Colt, Gunner’s Mate First Class Joseph Mitchell, and the U.S. legation’s secretary, Herbert G. Squiers, began experimenting with a “‘wire-wound gun,’ the basis of which was to be the cylinder of a pump.”¹⁴² These experiments came to a halt when several of the Chinese within the Legation Quarter unearthed a bronze cannon, possibly a remnant of the Anglo-French expedition during the Second Opium War. The Russians had arrived in Beijing with a chest of 3-inch ammunition, but had forgotten their field piece in Tianjin. When the siege began, they had thrown the shells down a well to prevent them from falling into Chinese hands.¹⁴³ Now, those shells were hauled up. They were too large for the bronze cannon, “so the gun was reamed out by the simple device of pounding a shell home and firing the gun.”¹⁴⁴ A gun carriage was taken from the Italian 1-pounder, and the cannon was lashed to the carriage with rope. Secretary Squiers harbored doubts about whether the shell would be able to penetrate. He was proved wrong when one of the first shots went through three walls of his house. The improvised cannon was christened the International Gun, though members of the guard knew the weapon as “Betsey” or “the Empress Dowager.”¹⁴⁵

The International Gun was primarily manned by Gunner’s Mate Joseph Mitchell, who fired it from different positions to convince the Chinese the allies had ample artillery. Lacking both a sight and accuracy, the gun could not fire at long range, but it inflicted heavy damage on enemy barricades and emplacements about 30 yards away, discharging its Russian shells followed by grapeshot consisting of old nails and bits of scrap iron. Unfortunately, the dense cloud of smoke it emitted afterward drew enemy fire.¹⁴⁶ Myers wrote, “This gun was a striking example of the Chinese proverb, ‘Any man can fire a gun, but who can tell where the shot will strike.’”¹⁴⁷

INNER TARTAR WALL

Above: Fortified ramp leading to the American position on the Tartar Wall.

Below: Section of the Tartar Wall held by the allies. (Upham, folder 11, Personal Papers Collection.)



OUTER TARTAR WALL



On the ramp.
(Smith, *China in Convulsion*, 1:354.)



American barricade.
(Smith, *China in Convulsion*, 1:354.)

View of the U.S. legation from the
barricaded Tartar Wall.
(LC, LC-USZ62-126020.)





The International Gun. (Upham, folder 11, Personal Papers Collection.)

The Chinese answered the International Gun with about 3,000 shells and cannonballs fired into the Legation Quarter's defenses during the course of the siege. Yet after the siege, the allies found hundreds of guns in and around Beijing, some still in their cases. The Chinese possessed enough artillery and ordnance that they could have fired that number daily, making life in the Legation Quarter untenable, yet they did not use it.¹⁴⁸ Captain Myers offered the following explanation: "It is thought the answer is, first because their officers do not lead them, and second, because of their superstition. They believed the foreigners to be assisted by spirit soldiers, and hence were afraid to venture too close to the lines which contained, for them, unknown possibilities."¹⁴⁹ However, historians have suggested the answer lies not in superstition but in political calculations. According to Ralph L. Powell, Ronglu, realizing the "futility of attempting to rid China of the foreigners by force," may have sabotaged the siege by withholding his supply of modern artillery and rifles from his soldiers.¹⁵⁰ When the Chinese did fire their artillery, the shells flew over the Americans more often than they struck. Occasionally, a shell would leave one Chinese position, sail over the Americans' heads, and fall upon the other Chinese position.¹⁵¹



Chinese soldiers with artillery. (LC, LC-USZ62-108165.)

Only once in Myers's experience, on 27 June, did the Chinese leave the safety of their defenses. In broad daylight, Chinese troops made a running advance from barricades about 400 yards away, toward the American position. They ran silently, without firing, hoping to catch the Americans "napping in the heat of the afternoon."¹⁵² When they were within 200 yards, the Americans fired over the tops of their barricades, convincing the Chinese to retreat. A few Chinese fell dead between the barricades, and as the summer days dragged on, temperatures reaching 110 degrees and "all the flies in Peking" swarming,¹⁵³ the stench of the corpses made it difficult to breathe.¹⁵⁴

Over the next three nights, the Chinese fired incessantly and advanced their barricades to within 30–40 yards of the Americans, gaining a position on the far side of the Americans' bastion.¹⁵⁵ They did this by

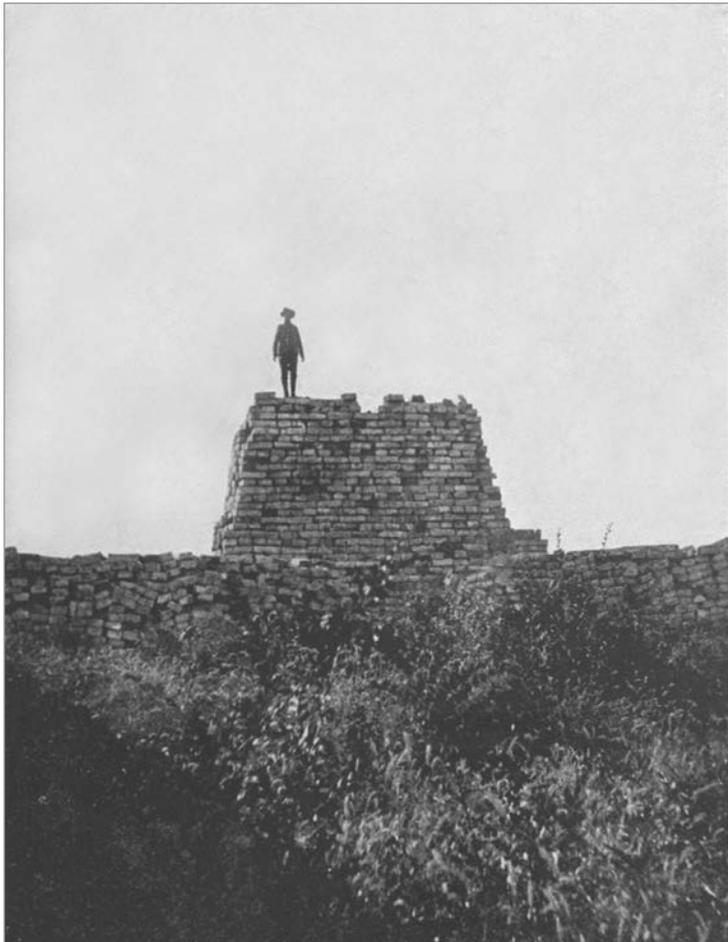
tunneling through the Chinese houses lining the street until they reached a point far enough along for a barricade. Then, they would begin to build from street level. Myers recalled, "One by one the bricks would appear, only the hands of the builders being visible. No matter how many shots were fired at this structure slowly arising before our eyes, the worker would continue to shove his bricks into place. . . . Barricades would spring up in a night, and the morning light would reveal the Chinese positions ten yards nearer than they had been the night before."¹⁵⁶

Captain Myers had evenly distributed his guard, with about 15 men at the wall barricade, 6 or 7 in a deep trench dug from the wall to the U.S. legation, about 20 at points throughout the legation, and 7 to 8 at the barricade across Legation Street. Now, as the Chinese encroached on the Americans' bastion, the Americans were reinforced with 10 Russians at the wall barricade and 6 or 7 British troops in the deep trench. On the east side of the wall, the Germans sent every one of their men to defend their barricade against increasingly determined Chinese attacks.¹⁵⁷

On 1 July, Ronglu's Center Division drove the Germans from the wall with heavy shellfire and captured their position.¹⁵⁸ Dangerously exposed at the rear, Myers withdrew his men, but after conferring with Minister Conger and Secretary Squiers, "it was decided that the place must be retaken and held at any cost."¹⁵⁹ Myers retook the position no more than 15 minutes later, and Minister Conger sent Chinese workers to build a barricade at the Americans' rear. Luckily, the Guards Army had not pressed its advantage in the Americans' absence. Ronglu's soldiers had been ordered to drive the Germans from the wall, and after accomplishing their mission, they rested. The Gansu soldiers opposing the Americans never emerged from their barricades, possibly sleeping after a long night.¹⁶⁰

That evening, Sir Claude MacDonald ordered Myers to rest inside the legation—the U.S. Marine captain had commanded the Americans atop the wall for five days straight with little to no sleep. Captain Newt Hall relieved Myers atop the wall for about a day. When Myers retook command the evening of 2 July, he found the Americans in a far less favorable position than he had left them. On Hall's watch, the Chinese soldiers had succeeded in building a barricade into and across the bastion. Now, they were in the process of building a tower directly to the Americans' left

flank, which would allow them to fire down onto the Americans. Myers observed, “Their work had been done with such infinite caution and so little exposure that although the fire upon them was incessant, their labor was in no way hindered.” He reported the situation to Secretary Squiers, who informed Minister Conger, who met with the British and Russian ministers and determined the Chinese could not be allowed to complete their tower. Minister Conger ordered Myers to take the Chinese position on the bastion.¹⁶¹



Chinese barricade and tower built near the American position. (*Military Order of the Dragon, 1900–1911* [Washington, DC: Byron S. Adams, 1912], 78.)

At around 0200 local time on 3 July, the Russians, who already had 10 men atop the bastion, sent an officer and 5 additional men, and the British sent about 20 men. By then, the Chinese had almost finished their tower and were daring to throw stones into the American barricade. Wasting no time, Myers ordered the allies to advance. On the right were the Russians with orders to dislodge the Chinese from the head of the double ramp. The British, on the left, and the Americans, in the center, prepared to climb over the Chinese barricades. At 0230, Captain Myers and eight men scrambled over the American barricade, lying flat on the ground as the Chinese opened a heavy fire. When the firing ceased, 55 allies charged against the several hundred Chinese soldiers atop the bastion. In a morale-boosting success that secured the wall and the legations, the allies drove the Chinese from their barricade to one about 100 yards further down the wall and inflicted a considerable loss of about 40 Chinese troops killed.¹⁶² However, the allied forces also sustained casualties. The Russians and British each had one wounded, and Myers regretfully reported that “two of the best men in the guard,” Privates Albert Turner and R. E. Thomas, were killed instantly by gunfire while charging at the Chinese.¹⁶³ In the dark, Turner had accidentally gotten ahead of the allied line, and his body was found inside the Chinese barricade. Captain Myers, too, was wounded by an “iron-pointed spear on the inner side and immediately below [the] right knee.”¹⁶⁴

Captain Hall took charge from the wounded Myers, but would not formally relieve him of his command until 21 July.¹⁶⁵ Although Myers had readily yielded to Minister Conger’s requests, Hall did not always acquiesce. This friction would lead Conger to accuse Hall of cowardice, sparking a flurry of media coverage until a Navy Department court of inquiry acquitted Hall of all charges.¹⁶⁶

On 12 July, Hall received orders to advance the Americans’ rear barricade 100 yards east to cover the Tartar Wall’s water gate (see Legation Quarter map). Holding the water gate was critical for two reasons: first, so messengers could pass through to carry communications to and from the allies in Tianjin, and second, so the international relief force could enter the Legation Quarter when it finally arrived. On 15 July, Secretary Squiers informed Hall the barricade was not far enough along the wall. Squiers

wanted the barricade 100 yards farther from the one Hall had begun, only yards from the Chinese barricade.¹⁶⁷



The Tartar Wall water gate. (Arthur H. Smith, *China in Convulsion*, vol. 2 [New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901], 416.)

At 0900, Captain Hall and Private Dan Daly walked along the wall to the desired position for the barricade. Provided the two marines were not attacked, Chinese workers were to arrive with sandbags 10 minutes later. The workers never came. Private Daly volunteered to remain atop the wall while Hall went back for the laborers. Reluctantly, Hall agreed. Hall returned to the American barricade to find the delay was due to the Chinese workers' interpreter, who could not understand English. Alone, Daly defended his position under constant fire until the laborers and reinforcements arrived—an act of heroism that inspired Hall to recommend Daly for the Medal of Honor.¹⁶⁸

Daly's Medal of Honor citation, described by journalist Charley Roberts as a "masterpiece of understatement,"¹⁶⁹ reads, "In the presence of the enemy during the Battle of Peking, China, 14 August 1900, Daly distinguished himself by meritorious conduct."¹⁷⁰ Roberts notes that the date

on the citation, 14 August, is when the international relief force arrived at Beijing, and “not necessarily the date of Daly’s heroic actions during the siege.”¹⁷¹ Daly would earn a second Medal of Honor for once again fighting “with exceptional gallantry against heavy odds” in Haiti in 1915, making him one of only two marines to earn the highest military award for two separate actions.¹⁷²

Another Medal of Honor was awarded posthumously to Private Harry Fisher, who was killed at 0930 on 16 July while guarding the American barricade and later buried in the Russian legation. Fisher was the first U.S. Marine to receive a Medal of Honor posthumously—except “Harry Fisher” was not his real name. On 6 March 1899, Franklin J. Phillips, a private in the 1st U.S. Infantry Regiment, had deserted from Camp Albert G. Forse in Huntsville, Alabama, after being refused a sick furlough for the malaria he had caught serving in Cuba. Phillips asked to be restored to duty on 17 March 1899, but instead found himself with a dishonorable discharge for desertion. Two months later, Phillips had joined the Marine Corps under the name “Harry Fisher.”¹⁷³



Graveyard in the Russian legation where the Americans and Russians were buried. (Upham, folder 11, Personal Papers Collection.)

The day after Phillips's death, an uneasy peace came to the Legation Quarter. A shipment of 200 melons, 150 pumpkins, and 200 pounds of flour arrived from the Zongli Yamen, and another shipment came courtesy of the empress dowager. Yet, the occasional stray shot punctuated the air.¹⁷⁴ This "half armistice" was the result of a correspondence between Sir Claude MacDonald and Prince Qing, leader of the Qing court's moderate faction.¹⁷⁵ MacDonald had suggested a cease-fire, and the Chinese had agreed, allowing the allies to establish contact with the world outside the Tartar Wall. A messenger of the Japanese colonel Shiba Goro brought word that the allies had captured the walled city of Tianjin and would soon march for Beijing.¹⁷⁶ Atop the Tartar Wall, the Chinese collected the bodies lying between the barricades and buried them.¹⁷⁷ One curious Chinese colonel inquired as to "who those men were that wore the big hats."¹⁷⁸ He was told they were U.S. Marines, and replied, "They don't shoot very often, but when they do I lose a man."¹⁷⁹

Chinese sharpshooters had also claimed their fair share of casualties. Before the Legation Quarter could be relieved, the international guard suffered losses of 67 killed and 167 wounded. Of the 56 sailors and marines from *Oregon* and *Newark*, seven were killed and 10 wounded.¹⁸⁰ One of the wounded was Assistant Surgeon Thomas Lippitt, who on 29 June was shot in the leg by rifle fire from over 1,500 yards away while leaving Minister Conger's house. American missionary George Lowry took over for the surgeon.¹⁸¹

For braving a street rife with Chinese gunfire to carry a message to the British legation, Hospital Apprentice Robert H. Stanley received the Medal of Honor. Another Navy recipient of the highest military honor was Gunner's Mate Joseph Mitchell.¹⁸² Mitchell's brief Medal of Honor citation states that he "distinguished himself by meritorious conduct" on 12 July.¹⁸³ That day, Mitchell had been firing the International Gun near the ruins of the Hanlin Academy when Chinese soldiers leaned their banner against the wall of the British legation. Mitchell grabbed one end of the black and red flag, a Chinese soldier grabbed the other, and a tug-of-war commenced, ending when Mitchell threw dirt in the face of the soldier, forcing him to let go. It was a small victory for the allies, who had cheered as the Chinese unleashed a volley of rifle fire on the Legation Quarter.¹⁸⁴

While dirt throwing would be against the spirit of a friendly tug-of-war, the international guard could not afford to fight fair. With casualties, their numbers had dropped below 400, and their perimeter remained surrounded by thousands of imperial troops who, in a month's time, would mount their fiercest attack on the besieged foreigners.

BATTLE OF TIANJIN, JUNE–JULY 1900

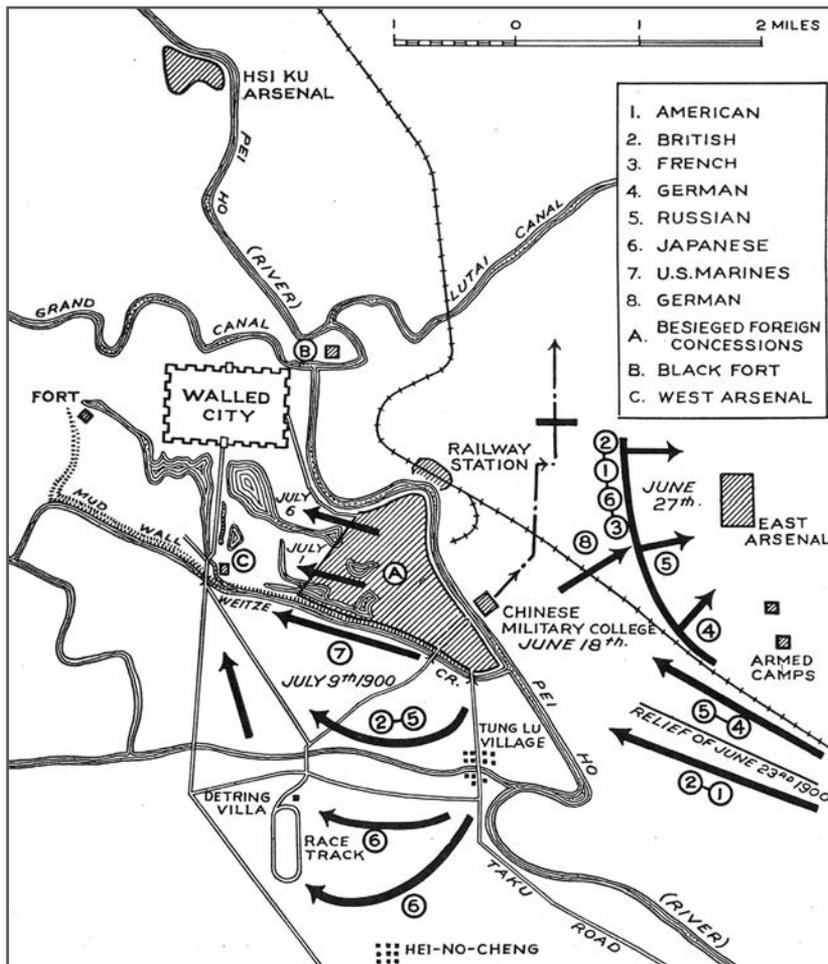
The metropolis of Tianjin was a major trading hub in 1900 that could be reached by rail or by the Hai River. The city center was surrounded by a 25-foot-high, 30-foot-wide brick wall built in 1405. Outside the city lay sprawling suburbs surrounded by a smaller mud wall, constructed in 1858 to defend against foreigners during the Second Opium War. When China lost and ratified the Treaty of Tianjin in 1860, Tianjin had opened to foreign residents.¹⁸⁵

Tianjin's foreign settlement extended for two miles along the Hai River within the mud wall. It resembled a European town with a horse racing course and polo grounds. Residents lived in the French, German, and British concessions, which had schools, hospitals, churches, and barracks. The United States had never taken jurisdiction of the land set aside in the 1860s for a U.S. concession but maintained a presence in Tianjin through a consulate in the foreign settlement.¹⁸⁶ In the summer of 1900, Americans living in Tianjin's concessions included the American consul James W. Ragsdale and none other than engineer and future president Herbert Hoover and his wife Lou.

For the foreigners and Chinese Christian refugees in Tianjin's concessions, the situation mirrored that of the Legation Quarter. In mid-June, Boxers tore through the walled Tianjin City, killing Chinese Christians and setting fire to churches and foreign shops. Then, their flames spread toward the foreign settlement. The concessions were guarded by 2,500 foreign soldiers—1,800 of which were Russian, and 25 of which were marines from *Monocacy* and *Yorktown*—along with civilian volunteers. On 15 June, the American consul Ragsdale and his two sons took up rifles to join the soldiers as the Boxers tried to enter the settlement.¹⁸⁷

Two days later, Ragsdale insisted the allies capture the Chinese military college only 300 yards from the concessions. He feared the college's 200 students and battery of eight large Krupp guns could spell the demise of the foreign settlement if they deigned to open fire. The allied commanders agreed and planned an attack at 1500 local time. They had just formed their line of attack when a shell whistled into the concessions from the viceroy's fort, about two miles away. Before the military college's Krupp

guns could join in the barrage, the allies captured the school, killing 50 students who refused to surrender.¹⁸⁸



Map of early operations in and around Tianjin from 18 June to 9 July. (Elbridge Colby, "Tientsin and the Boxer Rebellion," *The Military Engineer* 29, no. 165 [May-June 1937]: 195. Reprinted with permission of the Society of American Military Engineers.)



Company of Boxers in Tianjin, c. 1900. (LC, LC-USZ62-25864.)

The shells fired on 17 June from about 1500 to 1700 were likely the Qing empire's reply to the allies' ultimatum demanding the Dagu Forts. The viceroy of Tianjin, Yu Lu, had taken personal command of the Qing troops in Tianjin and ordered the bombardment, the brunt of which was borne by the French concession. Herbert Hoover himself led 1,000 Chinese Christian refugees to pile sacks of sugar, peanuts, rice, and grains along cross streets and exposed parts of the settlement as barricades. The women and children took shelter in Gordon Hall, a large building near the center of the concessions with ample cellars. A building that had been a settlement club was converted to a hospital, and future first lady Lou Hoover volunteered to assist the concession's two doctors and one nurse.¹⁸⁹ The first day of the siege, a shell struck the kitchen of Consul Ragsdale, and on the last day, two shells entered his consular office and a large piece of shell crashed through his bedroom window. Ragsdale later estimated 5,000 shells were fired into the settlement during the siege. "The shelling was far more terrific than any I experienced during the civil war," he recalled, "and I served under General Sherman."¹⁹⁰



Allies defending the French concession. (LC, LC-USZ62-25847.)

Over the first eight days of shelling, Qing soldiers advanced their lines until they occupied a section of the mud wall 600 yards east of the foreign settlement. There, they fired large guns and Mauser rifles directly into the concessions. Outside the settlement, Russian troops held the Tianjin railroad station, sustaining 90 casualties on 19 June in an attack by Chinese infantry. That day, the allies determined it was necessary to contact their compatriots at Dagou. Two search parties left the settlement, one on horseback, the other by boat. The boat party included R. H. Maclay, Consul Ragsdale's interpreter. The launch had traveled only nine miles along the Hai River when it ran into rocks placed by Boxers, forcing the men to make the rest of the journey on land. Miraculously, both parties made it to Dagou, carrying the message that the Tianjin concessions needed immediate relief.¹⁹¹



Tianjin railroad station damaged by shelling. (LC, LC-USZ62-102898.)

Initial Attack, 21 June 1900

Off Dagu, Rear Admiral Louis Kempff had been cabling Rear Admiral George C. Remy, commander of the Asiatic Station, with requests for reinforcements since early June. “I can not supply them,” Remy wrote to the Navy Department. “Affairs in the Philippines are considered paramount.”¹⁹² The Secretary of the Navy ordered Remy to dispatch reinforcements, and on 14 June, Spanish-American War hero Major Littleton W. T. Waller left Cavite on *Solace* with five officers and 101 enlisted marines from the 1st Regiment. Waller’s detachment arrived off Dagu on 18 June, joining a detachment of two officers and 30 enlisted marines from *Nashville*. Major Waller commanded the combined force of seven officers and 131 enlisted men, which was armed with a 3-inch field piece and a Colt machine gun.¹⁹³

The marines disembarked on 19 June and advanced to Tanggu on the morning of 20 June. Allied operations at Tanggu’s wharf and railroad station were coordinated by *Monocacy*’s captain, Commander Frederick

Wise, whom a council of allied senior naval officers had placed in charge following the capture of the Dagu Forts. Aided by a liaison officer from each of the allied nations, Wise moved 3,000 men, and their supplies and artillery, from Tanggu to Tianjin over the next two days.¹⁹⁴

Waller's marines commandeered a train and, with the help of Navy machinist's mates and water tenders from *Monocacy*, resuscitated its engine and departed for Tianjin, repairing the railroad as they went. Eight miles past Tanggu, the marines picked up a column of 400 Russian troops. Eighteen miles from Tanggu and twelve from Tianjin, the railroad track became impassable. Waller and the Russian commander agreed to bivouac for the night and hold their position until reinforcements arrived, but then the Russian commander changed his mind, informing Waller of his intent to push on for Tianjin. Waller objected, believing 530 men inadequate to pass the Chinese troops that lay between the allies and Tianjin's concessions. These were soldiers of General Nie's Front Division, positioned south of Tianjin to block allied reinforcements from Dagu.¹⁹⁵ Later, Waller wrote in his report that he was "overruled in council," though, with the exception of Rear Admiral Kempff, no one was senior to him.¹⁹⁶ Still, the marines joined the Russians in the early morning advance.

The Americans' 3-inch field piece proved defective, so Waller had it hidden in a canal. The column followed the rail line, the Colt gun crew at the front under the command of First Lieutenant William G. Powell, then the Russians, and the rest of the marines at the rear. The column advanced undisturbed until 0700, when it reached Tianjin's East Arsenal (see Tianjin Early Operations map). The Chinese opened a light fire from the arsenal and were silenced by marine sharpshooters. Then an estimated 1,500–2,000 Chinese troops opened heavy frontal and flanking fire. The Colt machine gun responded to the frontal fire, which came from hidden trenches, while the marines and the Russians opened fire on the right.¹⁹⁷ Boxers "annoyed" the marines to the left but were driven off.¹⁹⁸ The allies held their position until the Russians fell back, exposing the marines' left flank. Then, the Colt gun jammed, and all but one of its small crew were killed or wounded. Waller and the marines withdrew, bringing up the rear and fending off imperial troops and Boxers for four hours before reaching

safety at 1400 local time. The marines had marched for 30 miles, fought for five hours, and lost four killed and nine wounded.¹⁹⁹



Chinese soldiers at Tianjin firing from the shelter of a bank.
(LC, LC-USZ62-112326.)

Waller's report of the action on 21 June was pessimistic: "We are footsore and weary, but will go forward now. The condition at Tientsin is almost hopeless. If we can not attack tomorrow, I fear the worst."²⁰⁰

Relief of the Foreign Concessions, Capture of the East Arsenal, 21–27 June

Major Waller's fears had materialized: 530 men had proven inadequate to break through the Chinese defenses and relieve Tianjin's foreign concessions. Luckily, at around 1700 on 21 June, reinforcements began to arrive.²⁰¹ They came in trains dispatched from Tanggu station by *Monocacy's* captain Frederick Wise. First came a train carrying 500 Royal Welch

Fusiliers and 240 British bluejackets, along with *Monocacy's* 3-pounder, which was delivered to Waller. The train that followed transported 900 Russian troops, 100 horses, and four artillery units, each with a large gun and a light Maxim machine gun. The next morning, Wise dispatched a train of 200 Russians, 240 Germans, 100 horses, provision wagons, and two heavy British guns on fixed mounts, which were secured to a boxcar. Wise also sent along two platform cars, each containing a 5,000-gallon freshwater tank. Every car of every train Wise dispatched carried drinking water in "small utensils, breakers, buckets, cracker tins, etc.," since there was no potable water between Tangu and Tianjin.²⁰²

Altogether, on 22 June, the allies gathering south of Tianjin numbered about 2,000, half of which were Russian. The rest were British, German, American, Italian, and Japanese, in descending order of troop numbers. Waller wrote that he had "decided to act in cooperation with the British, under Commander [Christopher] Cradock"—seemingly a decision based on the failure of his alliance with the Russians the day before.²⁰³ That night, Waller sent 16 U.S. Marines to join the British on a reconnaissance mission. The allies' plan was to march on Tianjin the next morning to relieve the besieged concessions.²⁰⁴

At 0400 on 23 June, the allies broke camp and marched in two columns. The U.S. Marines formed the advance of the British column under Commander Cradock. The other column, primarily of Russian and German troops, set out first. When the U.S. Marines closed up, the Russians fired, mistaking them for Chinese. Several signals rectified the situation, and the allies marched on.

At 0700, the allies encountered the Chinese. The German and Russian column engaged soldiers firing from an arsenal and several forts, while the American and British column marched toward the city. For eight to nine miles, the U.S. Marines advanced under fire, the Chinese shooting high. This error was common among Chinese troops, and captured rifles often had their sights raised to the maximum setting. About 1,500 yards from the city, the marines fixed bayonets and charged the Chinese, who fled. Then, the marines encountered a large fort and heavy fire. They fought for over an hour before sheltering in a trench. To their rear in the

distance, they spied English and Russian flags. Then, an American flag was raised. It was the besieged concessions.

At 1230, the allies reached the foreign settlement. The U.S. Marines were the first to enter and were each treated to a bottle of beer.²⁰⁵ Private James J. Sullivan described “such shouting and cheering and crying and weeping for joy that was never heard before.”²⁰⁶ President Herbert Hoover later recalled, “I do not remember a more satisfying musical performance than the bugles of the American Marines entering the settlement playing ‘There’ll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight.’”²⁰⁷

On 24 June, a visitor arrived at Tianjin: the servant Chao Yin-ho, who brought word of Seymour and his force sheltered in the Xigu Arsenal. Feet swollen from marching about 50 miles, the allies rested for a day before setting out on 25 June with a force of 1,900 men. Among them were U.S. Marines under Major Waller and bluejackets from *Monocacy* under Lieutenant Noble E. Irwin. The Chinese fired as the allies crossed a bridge, but the bullets went high and all men made it across unscathed. Closer to the Xigu Arsenal, large numbers of Chinese attacked from the rear. The allies formed a skirmish line and, after 15 minutes of fighting, had driven the Chinese away. The next day, the Seymour Expedition and its rescuers returned to the foreign settlement to another ovation. The wounded Captain McCalla left Waller in charge of the combined force of American sailors and marines at Tianjin.²⁰⁸ In early June, McCalla had believed 850 foreign bluejackets and marines sufficient to defend Tianjin’s foreign concessions. Now he saw he had been mistaken. “I had entirely under-rated and misunderstood the conditions in Northern China, as well as the local situation,” he reflected. “It is a warning against overconfidence, where one has but little knowledge of a possible enemy, or of his resources.”²⁰⁹

On 27 June, the Russians attacked Tianjin’s East Arsenal but were repulsed. When they requested reinforcements, Waller sent Second Lieutenant Wade L. Jolly with 40 men, entrusting the Americans to Royal Navy commander Cradock. The allies were about 1,800 strong and facing an estimated 7,000 Chinese. Still, they succeeded in driving the Chinese from the arsenal. Naval Cadet Charles E. Courtney from *Newark* rode a borrowed bicycle at the front of the attacking force. He was dragging his bicycle up the East Arsenal’s ramparts when the arsenal’s interior

exploded, sending the naval cadet and his bicycle rolling back down. The Americans along with the British led the allies in a charge over the parapets, sustaining a loss of only one wounded.²¹⁰ Lieutenant Jolly was “overcome with heat, but not until after he had brought his men back to their quarters.”²¹¹ Lieutenant Arthur E. Harding captured an imperial flag and presented it to Waller.



Flag carried by Chinese units around the time of the Boxer Rebellion. (NHHHC, NH-92920-KN.)

Waller reported his men had marched 97 miles in a span of five days, living on one meal a day. “They have made history, marked with blood, if you please, still glorious and brilliant,” Waller wrote. However, he had criticisms for the recipients of his report. The U.S. Marines’ uniforms were comprised of trousers that “last about two days” and blue shirts that “make a splendid target.” And, after the initial operations at Tianjin, his force was 89 troops strong, “disgracefully small” when faced with what lay ahead.²¹²

Assault on the Walled City Delayed, Attack on the West Arsenal, 2–9 July

The allies may have relieved the foreign settlement, but Boxers and Chinese soldiers held both the walled Tianjin City and the West Arsenal, situated west of the concessions and within the suburban mud wall (see Tianjin Early Operations map). Local Boxer chiefs had allied with Viceroy Yu Lu, who wrote in a report that 30,000 Boxers would support his imperial soldiers in Tianjin. Before the allies could march for the besieged legations in Beijing, they had to take Tianjin City, which would secure the foreign settlement and provide a critical logistical base in the interior of China.²¹³

When the allies caught wind of 10,000 imperial troops marching for Tianjin on 2 July, Major Waller insisted the city should be taken at once, before the Chinese reinforcements arrived. Waller's position was informed by intelligence he had received from "private and reliable sources" that at that moment no imperial troops were within the walled city. Instead, Boxers congregated in the west suburbs and 3,500 troops under General Nie, along with several thousand rifle-armed Boxers and their leader, were concentrated near the viceroy's *yamen* (official residence), situated north of the city, across the Grand Canal. The 5,000 guards within the city belonged to Chinese merchants, who did not want to see Tianjin destroyed. Waller had proposed that the guards avoid firing on the allies and open the south gate of the Tianjin City wall in return for "immunity from trouble."²¹⁴

In an afternoon meeting on 2 July, the allied commanders decided against an immediate attack, as the Russian commander, who possessed nearly all the allied artillery, was not ready to move on the city. Waller voted against the delay, arguing it was better to move without the Russians than risk the arrival of 10,000 additional Chinese troops. The date for an attack was set for 4 July, but the plan was abandoned when the imperial troops arrived early, entering the city on the evening of 2 July and commencing a barrage of shellfire. Before the shelling ceased on 9 July, the marine barracks were struck three times.²¹⁵ Waller described the relations between the foreign powers as "outwardly friendly," but noted that the

Russians “delayed for two days the capture of Tientsin, and my prediction has come true.”²¹⁶

Skirmishes kept the allies busy in early July, with the Chinese attacking the foreign-held railroad station in the hopes of cutting off communication.²¹⁷ On 3 July, 80 marines under Lieutenant Smedley Butler joined British colonel Hamilton Bower and his regiment of enlisted Chinese from British-leased Weihai to capture a Chinese gun.²¹⁸ The allies failed to take the gun but engaged in hand-to-hand combat to capture two villages. When heavy fire pinned down Bower’s 1st Chinese Regiment, Butler led the marines in an advance that allowed the enlisted Chinese to retreat. Then the marines fell back by sections without any casualties. Colonel Bower sent his thanks to the marines, expressing admiration for their training and discipline.²¹⁹

On 7 July, Waller reported the Chinese army was moving westward, digging trenches around the foreign settlement to cut off allied communication along the Hai River. Two days later, the allies attacked the Chinese line at 0600 local time with about 2,000 men. Japanese major general Fukushima Yasumasa commanded a joint force of British, Japanese, and Americans. British brigadier general Arthur Dorward led a separate force of Russians, who had refused the command of a Japanese officer.²²⁰ Major Waller had predicted the discord between the two nations, which in a few years’ time, would fight the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) over control of Manchuria (now Northeast China). In a report on 7 July, Waller had voiced his willingness to serve under either a Japanese field marshal or a “prince of blood” given the need for “a common head for the military operations,” but noted that he “did not think the Russians or French would so agree.”²²¹

The allies attacked in two columns to the west of the concessions. Waller commanded the right column, consisting of his men and Japanese sailors. The allies were shelled heavily but without casualty, though the shells threw up a stinging cloud of dust, stone, and gravel. Within 30 minutes, the left column had forced the Chinese to retreat, some fleeing west, others falling back into the West Arsenal. Japanese cavalry pursued the fleeing troops, killing many and capturing a field battery, four guns, and the Chinese standards.

British and Japanese batteries silenced Chinese guns firing from a mud fort west of the arsenal. Major Waller's column charged the arsenal, which lay beyond a canal and behind the suburban mud wall, but met heavy fire. Waller deployed the Americans to lie atop the roofs of huts and clear the plain between the arsenal and Tianjin City. He then ordered his men to cross the canal bridge, which was exposed to fire from the city walls and surrounding suburbs. Once over, the Americans deployed along the mud wall, located the Chinese positions, and opened fire. Their volleys allowed the wounded, the Japanese battery and infantry, and the British battery and infantry, including an Indian contingent and the 1st Chinese Regiment, to cross without sustaining any casualties.²²² The Russian infantry relieved the Americans along the mud wall to protect the passage of their own troops.²²³

As the allies advanced on the West Arsenal, the Chinese defenders fled, destroying the structure's north wall as they went. Without the north wall, the arsenal was exposed to fire from the south wall of Tianjin City, preventing the allies from occupying it.²²⁴

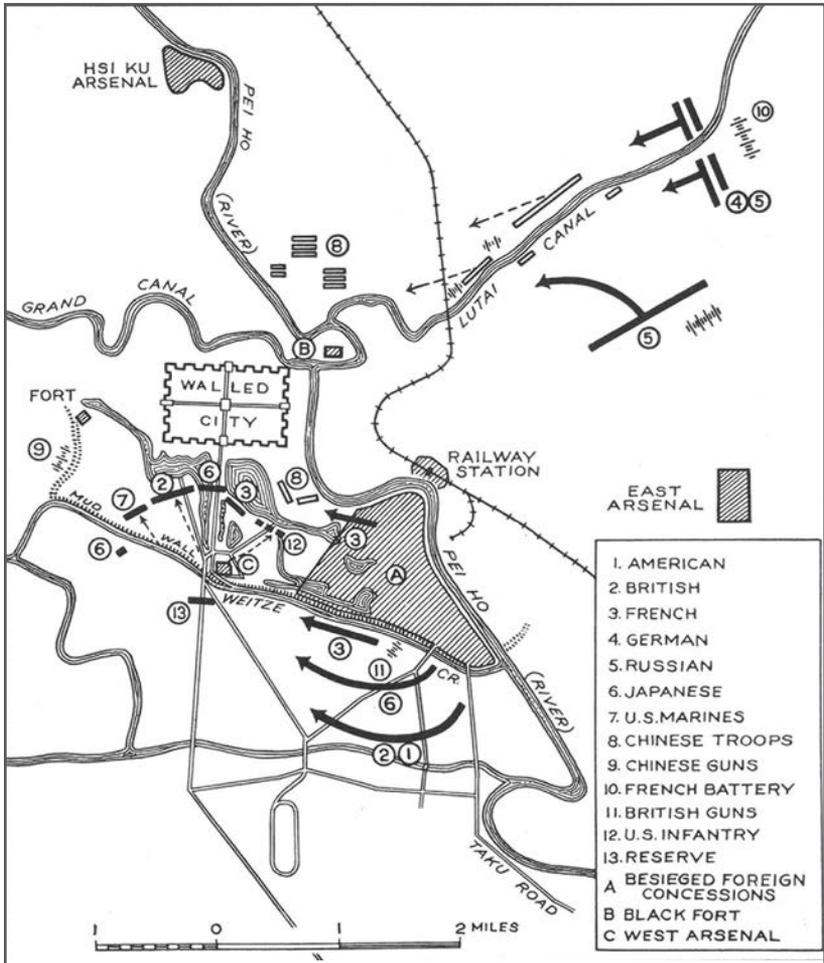
Waller reported Chinese casualties numbered at least 500, and allied casualties were about 45, of which 7 were killed. One of the dead on the Chinese side was Front Division commander General Nie Shicheng. The morning advance had successfully cleared three miles west of the allied lines of Chinese troops, preserving the Hai River as a line of communication.²²⁵

After the skirmish, Waller received letters of thanks from Major General Fukushima, Admiral Seymour, and Colonel Bower for the actions of the Americans, which had reduced allied casualties. Fukushima even sent along a present: a field gun captured in the day's action by the Japanese cavalry.²²⁶

Attack on the Walled City, 13–14 July

On 11 July, Colonel Emerson Liscum arrived in Tianjin with the 9th Infantry, the first U.S. Army regiment to join the summer campaign. The 9th had prepared to depart on 18 June, but a typhoon delayed their leaving until 27 June. Just after midnight, the Americans were further reinforced by Colonel Robert Meade with a detachment of 318 marines from

Brooklyn.²²⁷ Major Waller had requested to stay in command of the marines because he was “in touch with the situation and in splendid condition physically for the enormous amount of work to be done.”²²⁸ However, seniority won out and Meade took command of the marines upon his arrival.



Map of allied operations in Tianjin on 13 July. (Colby, “Tientsin and the Boxer Rebellion,” 197. Reprinted with permission of the Society of American Military Engineers.)

The council of senior officers met on 12 July at the headquarters of Brigadier General Dorward and decided to take Tianjin City the next day. Colonel Meade was asked to provide 1,000 men for the effort. He furnished 22 officers and 326 enlisted men from his 1st Marine Regiment and 673 men from the 9th Infantry. In total, about 5,650 allied troops would face a force of about 20,000 Chinese troops (by Admiral Seymour's estimation) and an indeterminate number of Boxers. Two columns, one composed of the British and Americans commanded by Dorward, and another of the Japanese and French, would attack Tianjin City from the south. Meanwhile, the Russians and Germans would attack from the east.²²⁹

At 0300 on 13 July, Meade marched from the barracks with his marines. The Royal Welch Fusiliers headed the American and British column, followed by Colonel Meade and U.S. Marine Companies A, C, D, and F. These were commanded by Lieutenant Smedley Butler, Captain Austin R. Davis, Captain Charles G. Long, and Captain Ben H. Fuller, respectively. Company F under Captain Fuller was armed with three 3-inch rapid-fire guns and three Colt machine guns. After the U.S. Marines came the English naval brigade and then the U.S. 9th Infantry Regiment under Colonel Liscum. The Japanese and French column marched to the right of the British and Americans. The two southward-attacking columns had verbal orders to convene for a commanding officers' meeting once they had advanced closer to the city, but no meeting occurred. All decisions would be made in the heat of battle.²³⁰

Meade ordered Companies A and C to advance north along the mud wall surrounding Tianjin's suburbs while the artillery-equipped Company F and its infantry support, Company D, acted with the British artillery to fire on "particularly obnoxious" mounted Chinese guns.²³¹ At around 0500, Companies A and C arrived near the mud wall's south gate. Behind the mud wall, the Chinese fired from the West Arsenal. The naval battery of HMS *Terrible*, two 12-pounders and one 4-inch, replied with accurate shellfire.²³² At 0545, the Chinese magazine exploded "with a shock which was almost like an earthquake shock" for the allies standing a full mile and a half from the blast.²³³

At 0630, Brigadier General Dorward ordered Meade's Companies A and C to support the Royal Welch Fusiliers on the extreme left of the allied

lines. The U.S. Marines and Fusiliers crossed Tianjin's mud wall and entered the Chinese suburbs. There, they encountered flat, swampy ground with "grave mounds and dikes and ditches."²³⁴ The mounds and dikes provided much-needed cover, as otherwise the marines would have needed to dig trenches with their bayonets. Still, casualties mounted in the face of accurate fire from Chinese infantry and artillery. Meade's marines made rushing advances to trenches within 800 yards of the walls of Tianjin City.²³⁵ There, the U.S. Marines and Fusiliers found "very bad swamps and a stream of water" that prevented further progress.²³⁶



Mounds of a 500-year-old graveyard in Tianjin, c. 1900. Colonel Meade and the marines sheltered behind similar grave mounds in their advance on Tianjin City. (LC, LC-DIG-stereo-1s19744.)

For 12 hours—from 0800 to 2000—the U.S. Marines held their position armed with 180 rounds per man. Chinese imperial troops fired from the Tianjin City walls and Boxers sniped from positions in the suburbs.²³⁷ Twice, attackers approached from the U.S. Marines' left flank. The first

time, at 0830, the marines in the trenches drove them away. The second time, at 1400, Company D fired on the attackers from the mud wall. The company, under Captain Long, had supported the artillery Company F until the 3-inch guns had fired 130 rounds and exhausted the ammunition supply. Then, Company D and the Colt gun crews from Company F, a force of about 100 men, had crossed the mud wall to support the marines in the trenches.²³⁸

As nighttime neared, Meade feared the possibility that ammunition would run out, leaving the marines with only bayonets to fight. Finally, Dorward gave the order to withdraw. Under constant fire, the marines withdrew in small parties of 8 or 10 men “by rushes from mound to mound and trench to trench.” They reached a safe position near the mud wall’s south gate, with only one man hit during the retreat. There, the troops slept with their weapons.²³⁹

Five marines were killed at the Battle of Tianjin on 13 July, including Captain Davis, commander of Company C, who died at Meade’s side while fighting in the forward trench. Marine casualties also included 23 wounded, of which seven were seriously wounded. Company N, which held the railroad station despite heavy artillery fire, had a loss of one killed and four wounded. Meade commended Lieutenant Butler, commander of Company A, who left the trenches to rescue a wounded man and was shot in the thigh, as well as First Lieutenant Henry Leonard, who brought the wounded Butler to safety and in doing so was shot in the left arm, which was later amputated.²⁴⁰

The U.S. Marines may have endured a grueling fight in swampy trenches, but their losses paled in comparison to those of the 9th Infantry Regiment. That morning, outside the West Arsenal, the regiment deployed in a single line behind the other forces. Chinese fire flew high, passing over troops nearer to the mud wall and falling among the 9th. Within a half hour, the regiment had sustained nine casualties.

Dorward sent a staff officer with orders that the 9th advance to the relative safety of the mud wall, then move to the left of the Japanese. Liscum asked for further instructions, but received none. While leading his troops through the mud wall, Liscum joined Dorward, who said it did not matter whether the 9th went to the right or left. Thus, while the

marines went to the extreme left, the soldiers of the 9th found themselves on the extreme right, exposed to fire from a mud village to the east.

Colonel Liscum had no time to receive further orders. He decided to advance on the mud village over a field made nearly impassable by ditches, holes, and deadly fire. Bravely, Liscum marched along a raised road, which allowed him a view of his troops, but made him vulnerable to fire flying from multiple directions. Then a canal stopped the regiment's assault in its tracks. The color sergeant fell. Liscum lifted the regimental colors and, a moment later, received a mortal wound.²⁴¹ At around 0900, as Liscum lay dying, he told his men, "Keep up the fire."²⁴² His last words became the regiment's motto.²⁴³

Pinned down by bullets, the 9th Infantry Regiment could not retreat until 2000, when bluejackets from the English naval brigade and the U.S. Marines provided covering fire.²⁴⁴ The marines belonged to Company F under Captain Fuller, and at around 1000, about 60 of them had advanced from the West Arsenal, across the open field, to ditches 200 yards in the rear of the 9th Infantry. There they remained, sheltered behind a house, protecting the infantry's right flank but unable to engage the Chinese, who were "practically invisible."²⁴⁵ When the 9th Infantry Regiment reached the shelter of the house, an English hospital steward treated the wounded, who were carried to safety by the bluejackets and marines.²⁴⁶

At the end of 13 July, the 9th Infantry's losses were 17 killed and 71 wounded.²⁴⁷ Dorward later took responsibility for the regiment's misfortune:

I blame myself for the mistake made in the taking up of their position by the Ninth Regiment, not remembering that troops wholly fresh to the scene of action and hurried forward in the excitement of attack were likely to lose their way. Still the position they took up and gallantly stuck to all day undoubtedly prevented a large body of the enemy from turning the right of the attack line and inflicting serious loss on the French and Japanese.²⁴⁸

Dorward sought to prove the 9th Infantry's sacrifice had not been in vain, but as night fell, none of the allied forces had made significant progress. Like the U.S. Marines, the Russians and Germans attacking from the east had scaled the mud wall, but made little headway into the city. The Japanese had tried and failed to blow up Tianjin City's south gate.

The allied forces rested for the night—except for the Japanese. Under the cover of darkness, the Japanese placed tins of gun cotton (nitrocellulose) against the city's south gate and lit a fuse. Three times, Chinese gunfire put out the fuse. At 0300, a brave engineer rushed the south gate with a box of matches and lit the tins of gun cotton, which blew up both the gate and the engineer.²⁴⁹

The U.S. Marines moved into Tianjin City at 0600 on 14 July, their only resistance from Boxers firing from the suburbs. Once through the south gate, the marines confronted streets strewn with dead Chinese people and dead animals.²⁵⁰ Second Lieutenant Frederic Wise Jr., son of *Monocacy's* captain Frederick Wise, described the scene as “a picture of hell's delight.”²⁵¹ Consul Ragsdale estimated Chinese losses in treasure and munitions of war of at least 25,000,000 taels, or 17,500,000 U.S. gold dollars.²⁵²

As the timbers of burning buildings collapsed with a roar, Tianjin City was looted by Chinese civilians and allied troops alike. Wise watched as allies “staggered through the streets, arms and backs piled high with silks and furs and brocades, with gold and silver and jewels.”²⁵³ Within a few days, the post of his U.S. Marine Company C resembled “the appearance of a wealthy Chinese lady's private apartments as men sat around off duty comparing trophies.”²⁵⁴ The U.S. War Department wrote to the commander of the 9th Infantry, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Coolidge, asking if American troops had taken part in the spoils and demanding severe punishment for looters. Coolidge replied that reports of looting by Americans were “unfounded and denied.”²⁵⁵



Antiquated and modern Chinese shells captured by the allies at Tianjin.
(LC, LC-USZ62-126019.)

Order was needed, so the allies divided the city into four quarters under the Americans, Japanese, British, and French. A representative from each of the eight powers present—Russia, Japan, Italy, Great Britain, France, Austria, Germany, and the United States—met to establish rules for a provisional government. Colonel Meade attended on behalf of the United States, and the representatives agreed a council of one Russian, one Japanese, and one Englishman would temporarily govern Tianjin.²⁵⁶ They also issued a proclamation to the city's inhabitants:

This administration will protect everyone wishing to deal in a friendly manner with foreigners, but will punish without mercy everyone who causes trouble.

Let the bad people tremble, but the good people should feel reassured and quietly return to their houses and begin their usual work. Thus peace will be restored.²⁵⁷



Boxer prisoners captured by the U.S. 6th Cavalry at Tianjin.
(LC, LC-USZ62-68811.)

The Americans were assigned the southeast quarter of Tianjin, and within it lay the charred ruins of the salt commissioner's *yamen*. Inside, they found treasure: silver bullion, which had fused with brick, mortar, and debris. Lieutenant Wise oversaw the removal of the bullion, and J.P. Morgan purchased it for three bank drafts totaling \$376,300 made payable to the order of the Secretary of the Navy.²⁵⁸ The U.S. government intended the profits to count toward "reparations claims for Boxer outrages."²⁵⁹ A lighter transported the bullion down the Hai River from Tianjin to Dagu, then a steamer carried it to the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation in Shanghai.²⁶⁰

Other lighters journeying down the Hai River carried the wounded from the Battle of Tianjin. One held the body of Colonel Emerson Liscum, which was sent to Tanggu for a burial with military honors. The ceremony was organized by *Monocacy's* captain Frederick Wise and attended by all senior officers of the allied naval fleets.²⁶¹



Prince Yang Che, a Boxer chief captured near Tianjin. (LC, LC-USZ62-25880.)

Out of a coalition force of 5,650, allied casualties for the Battle of Tianjin totaled 750 killed, wounded, and missing. The Japanese sustained the highest losses with 320 killed and wounded, followed by the Americans with 23 killed, 98 wounded, and one missing.²⁶² Still, Chinese losses were far greater, exceeding 15,000 casualties in the month of fighting.²⁶³ Despite miscommunications, the allies had won a costly and critical victory. They had gained a foothold in the interior of China and could turn their attention toward a march to Beijing.

CHINA RELIEF EXPEDITION, AUGUST 1900

On 4 August, an allied force with a reported strength of 20,100 marched from Tianjin²⁶⁴—only about half of the “40,000 seasoned troops, with not less than 25,000 in the attacking column” that Major Littleton Waller had assessed as the minimum force needed to take Beijing.²⁶⁵ However, it is possible that the coalition’s strength was even less. In his personal account, Colonel Aaron S. Daggett recorded the reported total as 18,600 but noted the figure was “too large” and that “the effective force probably did not exceed 16,000 men.”²⁶⁶

The initial departure date for the relief force was set for 14 August, but the Americans, British, and Japanese were ready sooner. U.S. Army general Adna Chaffee, who had overall command of the Americans, had arrived in Tianjin on 30 July. Once Captain Henry J. Reilly’s Light Battery F of the 5th Artillery had reached Tianjin on 3 August, Chaffee was itching to go, announcing to the allied commanders that, if necessary, the Americans would march for Beijing alone.

British general Sir Alfred Gaselee, the acting commander of the international coalition, shared Chaffee’s sense of urgency. The legations at Beijing could not hold out much longer, Gaselee had insisted. The allies should strike while the Chinese were still reeling from their loss at Tianjin. On 21 July, Gaselee had received a letter from British minister Sir Claude MacDonald that the legations had two weeks of provisions, but were eating their ponies. MacDonald’s message had taken two weeks to deliver.²⁶⁷

The French and Russians had worried that in early August the allies would face heat exhaustion or torrential rain. The Americans and British had argued that with further delays, they would be halted by a harsh winter and a frozen Hai River.²⁶⁸

The allies may have had motives beyond the weather. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Leonhard, a retired Army officer and research analyst, has suggested that the Russians and the French wanted to delay the march until their reinforcements arrived, giving them a “more dominant political position” when the allies took Beijing.²⁶⁹ Meanwhile, historian David Silbey has pointed out that Gaselee may have wanted to march for Beijing before the commander chosen by the allies—German field marshal Alfred von Waldersee—could arrive in theater.²⁷⁰

In the end, the allies gave the Russians an ultimatum: go now with the coalition, or go alone whenever they pleased.²⁷¹ By Colonel Daggett's count, the force that departed Tianjin on 4 August included 8,000 Japanese, 4,300 Russians, 3,000 British, 2,500 Americans, and 800 French.²⁷² Commanded by General Chaffee, the American troops were comprised of the 14th Infantry Regiment under Colonel Daggett, elements of the 9th Infantry Regiment under Colonel Coolidge, Captain Reilly's Light Battery F of the 5th Artillery, a troop from the 6th Cavalry, and two battalions of marines.²⁷³



On the outskirts of Tianjin, the 9th Infantry Regiment begins the march to relieve the besieged Legation Quarter. (LC, LC-USZ62-87024.)

Major William P. Biddle, newly arrived in theater, had overall command of the two U.S. Marine battalions, which totaled 29 commissioned officers and 453 enlisted men. Major Littleton Waller commanded the 1st Battalion with Companies A, C, and H. Waller was second in command of the marines because Colonel Meade had been relieved by a medical survey board due to rheumatism and sent for treatment at the Mare Island

hospital.²⁷⁴ Smedley Butler, recently released from the hospital for his thigh wound, had command of Company A. While recovering, Butler had been brevetted a captain—a promotion that was nearly denied to him when a medical board declared him unfit to perform the duties of captain due to blood loss.²⁷⁵ Captain F. M. Moses commanded the 2nd Battalion with Companies D, I, and F. A guard of 185 marines remained in Tianjin, along with most of the 6th Cavalry, whose horses had not arrived in time for the march.²⁷⁶

The failed Seymour Expedition had followed the railroad, but the allies knew the line would be destroyed beyond Yangcun. Instead, they decided to follow the Hai River to Tongzhou (Tungchow) and attack Beijing from the east.²⁷⁷ The Americans loaded their supplies onto a fleet of 30 junks commanded by Lieutenant Wirt McCreary, who fashioned himself an admiral's flag out of a blue flannel shirt.²⁷⁸ The river, rather than the railroad, would be the allies' last hope.



Junks on the Hai River transporting U.S. Army supplies to Beijing.
(LC, LC-USZ62-126022.)

Battle of Beicang, 5 August 1900

The allies bivouacked the first night near the Xigu Arsenal, the site of the Seymour Expedition's salvation. Ahead, near the village of Beicang, lay 10,000–12,000 Chinese troops and Boxers. Japanese reconnaissance reported the Chinese were entrenched along the Hai River in a line extending three miles west to an arsenal. Both the imperial troops and Boxers were commanded by General Dong Fuxiang, who had led his combined force from Beijing to halt the advance of the foreigners and recapture Tianjin.²⁷⁹

At 0100 on 5 August, the allied forces advanced on Beicang, the Russians and French on the left (north) bank of the Hai River, and the Japanese, British, and Americans on the right. The Japanese, followed by the British and the Americans, planned to destroy the arsenal, then advance toward the river and attack the Chinese trenches from the rear.

When the Japanese reached the arsenal, they found the ground between it and the Hai River too narrow to wait for the rest of their column. They attacked and began to chase the Chinese troops to the river. At about 0500, the Japanese sent a message asking for the British and Americans to face north and attack the Chinese. To get into position, the Americans had to march south and west around the British and, by that time, the Chinese had retreated.²⁸⁰

Battle of Yangcun, 6 August 1900

The Chinese forces at Beicang fell back about 12 miles to Yangcun, the next sizable village along the Hai River. The Japanese had borne the brunt of the casualties at Beicang, and so at Yangcun, the Americans and the British spearheaded the main attack.²⁸¹

At around 0600 on 6 August, the main arm of the allies advanced along the left (east) bank of the Hai River in three columns, each having crossed the river on a pontoon bridge built by the Japanese. The American column marched along the destroyed railroad track, the 14th Infantry leading, a battalion of the 9th Infantry on the right, two battalions of the 14th on the left, the marines in the center, and Captain Reilly's artillery battery between the advance and main columns. The other two columns, the British and the Russo-French, marched along the river road running

parallel to the railroad. The Japanese marched on their own along the right bank of the river.²⁸²

The Chinese lay in wait about a mile and a half from Yangcun where the railroad crossed the Hai River. General Gaselee asked for the 14th Regiment to support the British in attacking along the west side of the railroad embankment while General Chaffee led the 9th, the U.S. Marines, and Captain Reilly's battery in attacking along the east.

As Chaffee's forces advanced, Chinese infantry opened fire from a village on their right flank. Chaffee moved against the village, silencing the guns and setting it ablaze, but when Gaselee sent two messages requesting immediate support, a frustrated Chaffee led his force back toward the railroad, though the village had not been entirely "cleaned out."²⁸³ Chaffee "was loath" to follow Gaselee's orders as he believed both the British, and the Russians to their left, possessed ample artillery.²⁸⁴ Major Waller reported that changes in direction and objective combined with intense heat and movement through high cornfields led to men dropping from heat exhaustion.²⁸⁵

Chaffee ordered the marines and artillery to the 20-foot-high railroad embankment, and Captain Reilly's men prepared to fire, but held off when Chaffee spotted men of the 14th Regiment climbing a section of the embankment in front of the American guns. A minute later, Chinese troops hidden in cornfields fired at short range. Captain Reilly's artillery and the marines quickly suppressed the fire.

The 9th Infantry fell in on the right flank of the marines and artillery. Then, an opportunity to inflict damage on the Chinese appeared, but Colonel Coolidge ordered the 9th to withhold fire. Coolidge had mistaken Chinese flags for French ones. His caution was a result of allied communications warning the Americans to look out for Russian and French troops likely to pass their position. In reality, neither nation's forces had advanced beyond the American line.²⁸⁶

Friendly fire was a legitimate concern for the 14th Infantry, supporting the British. The infantry's 3rd Battalion had advanced to within a few hundred yards of Yangcun, racing and overtaking a Sikh regiment, when it was hit by artillery from three directions. Behind the 3rd, the 2nd Battalion sustained casualties as shells from the left and rear exploded on

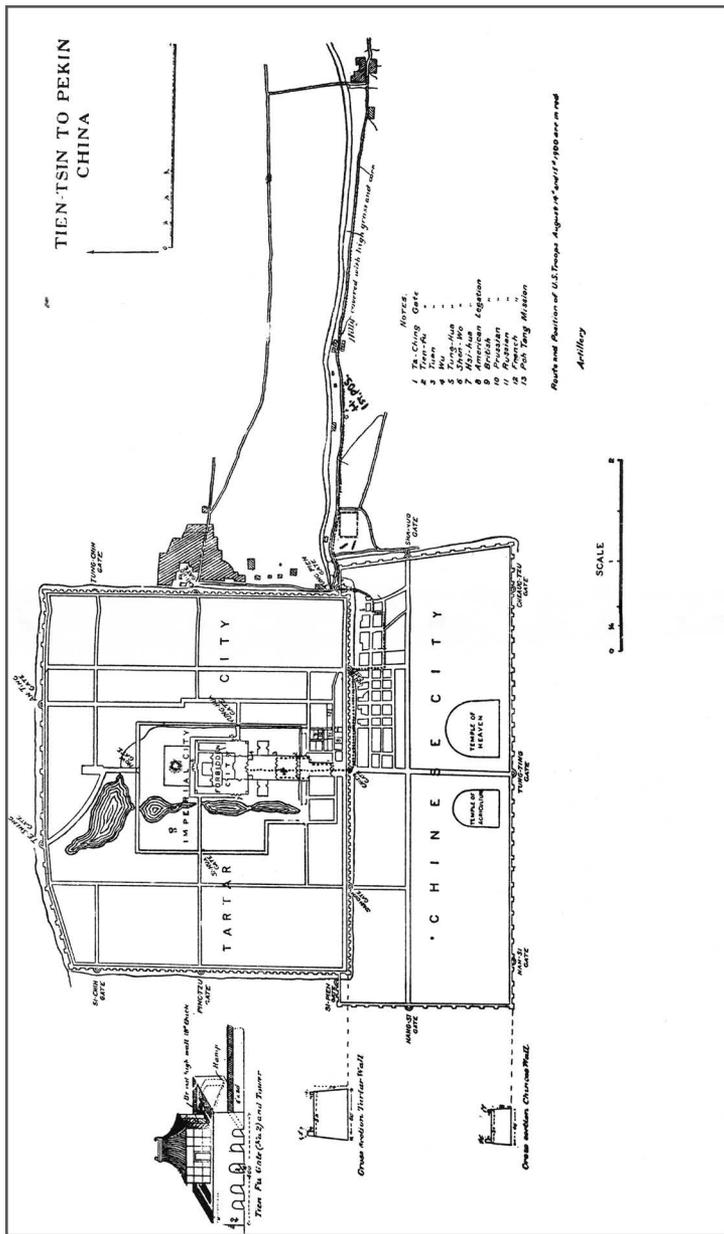
its position atop the railroad embankment. Captain Frank Eastman, the 2nd Battalion commander, sent his adjutant to put a stop to the deadly allied shelling. The adjutant was overcome by heat, but not before finding a mounted messenger, who reached the allied batteries, causing the shelling to cease.²⁸⁷

The 14th Regiment advanced to the far edge of Yangcun, then halted out of sheer exhaustion. The 9th Infantry, U.S. Marines, and Reilly's battery continued to the villages to the north and took them with little-to-no opposition. The Marine Corps' casualties were one wounded and one dead from the heat.²⁸⁸ In fact, Company H failed to move on the final village, "being nearly prostrated by the heat in the cornfield."²⁸⁹

In his report of the action, General Chaffee blamed the friendly fire on the Russian or British batteries, suggesting either was responsible for 25–30 of the 14th Regiment's casualties of 7 killed and 57 wounded. Chaffee was chafing under the leadership of Gaselee, whose orders he had reluctantly obeyed. One month later, a report would fault Russian artillery, firing at the request of the British, for the 14th Regiment's misfortune. The British measured artillery adjustments in yards while the Russians calculated in meters, and the discrepancy had been deadly at Yangcun.²⁹⁰

Battle of Beijing, 14–16 August 1900

On the march toward Beijing, the greatest enemy was the heat. Exhausted men from every nation lined the roads during the day and rejoined their units at night. Those who could not catch up on their own two feet were hauled into camp in ambulances belonging to the medical department accompanying the expedition. The interservice department was comprised of personnel from both the Army and Navy, who established camps for the sick at three towns along the route. During the 80-mile slog that had started at Tianjin, 123 marines were detached, 46 were placed on junks, 13 were sent to the hospital, 15 were reported missing, and one was killed. Private James J. Sullivan, who had been the first American to enter and relieve the besieged Tianjin concessions, would die in a hospital in China from brain fever caused by the intense heat. Before reaching Beijing, the U.S. Marine battalions' strength was reduced by 103 enlisted men and five officers.²⁹¹



Map of Beijing with the route the Americans took on 14 and 15 August. (A. S. Daggett, *America in the China Relief Expedition* [Kansas City: Hudson Kimberly, 1903], map insert.)

One consolation was that resistance from Chinese imperial troops was scattered. Nor did the Boxers harass the allied column as they had the Seymour Expedition. Historian David Silbey attributes the absence of the Boxers in part to their successful decimation of the Chinese Christian population²⁹²—32,000 Chinese converts were killed during the uprising, and surviving converts fled their villages.²⁹³ Silbey suggests one more reason for the Boxers' disappearance: the August rainfall, which brought crops that needed tending.²⁹⁴ For First Lieutenant Wise, the rain was no blessing. "All it could do was soak us and make us, if possible, more miserable, as we staggered on," he wrote.²⁹⁵

On 12 August, Japanese forces blew down the gate to Tongzhou, the last town along the Hai River before Beijing. After the Japanese came the Russians and the Indian cavalry. Boxers had looted and killed suspected foreign sympathizers at Tongzhou, and the town took another beating at the hands of the foreigners.²⁹⁶ For hours, Wise had heard the sounds of battle, and he arrived at a town that stank of death, his boots crunching on a "carpet of shattered porcelain, cloisonne, enamel, [and] lacquer."²⁹⁷ The rest of the allied forces arrived by the afternoon, and the commanders met to plan their final attack on Beijing. The Russian commander, General Nikolai Linevich, argued his troops needed a day of rest. The other commanders disagreed but reached a compromise. On the 13th, the allies would conduct a reconnaissance of the key gates on the east of Beijing. The next day, the commanders would concentrate their troops on an advance line seven miles from Tongzhou and hold a final meeting to coordinate. Finally, on 15 August, each nation would attack their assigned gate and hope that the foreigners in the legations were still alive.²⁹⁸

The Americans' route would take them along a road south of a canal to the Dongbianmen (Tungpienmen), the northeast gate of the outer city, called Chinese City (see Beijing map). The British would march to the Americans' left and take the outer city's east gate. North of the outer city was the inner city, or Tartar City, surrounded by the Tartar Wall. The Japanese were given the east gate of the Tartar City, and the Russians, the northeast gate.²⁹⁹

As evening fell on 13 August, Chinese imperial troops responded to the allied presence outside Beijing's walls by making their strongest

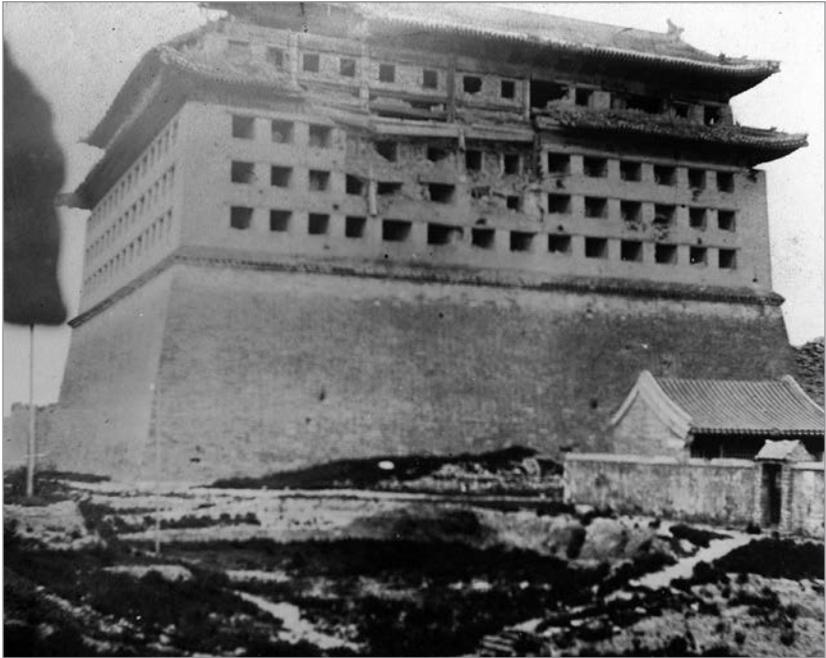
attempt to break into the legations. The troops belonged to a newly arrived division from Shanxi (Shansi) Province, and their commander had sworn to take the Legation Quarter in five days. To the north of the legations, the Chinese mounted a 2-inch quick-firing Krupp gun that inflicted heavier damage than all their artillery during the rest of the siege. Sir Claude MacDonald called for the American Colt, which had been consigned to the British legation as a last resort, and the Colt and Austrian Maxim worked in tandem to silence the Krupp after its seventh round. In the streets, Chinese troops cried “*Sha! Sha!*” and attacked the west wall of the British legation. Gunner’s Mate Joseph Mitchell arrived at the British lines with the International Gun, and was sitting behind it when, at 0200, a bullet passed through a rifle porthole and shattered his arm.³⁰⁰



Wall of Beijing. (Upham, folder 11, Personal Papers Collection.)

Outside the walls of Beijing, the Americans in the international relief force waited and worried, kept awake by the artillery and small arms fire. Meanwhile, under the cover of darkness, the Russians stole a march on the allies. Collaboration had prevailed over rivalries throughout the campaign, but now, close to Beijing, it appeared national ambition had won

out. Russian reconnaissance had discovered the Chinese defenses were lightest at the Dongbianmen, the gate assigned to the Americans. The Russian commander had ordered his subordinate, General Vassilevski, to secure the gate. Instead, Vassilevski blasted a hole in the gate and entered the city.³⁰¹



The guard tower of the Dongbianmen, the gate assigned to the Americans, with damage from Reilly's battery. (*Baltimore* [C-3] scrapbook, box S-519, S Collection, NDL.)

By moving first, the Russians suffered the worst of the Chinese defenses. Their attack bogged down under fire by sharpshooters atop the Tartar Wall—and Russian troops were still at the Dongbianmen when General Chaffee arrived in the late morning on the 14th. He reported the Russians were “in great confusion in the passage, their artillery facing in both directions, and I could see no effort being made to extricate themselves and give passage into the city.”³⁰²

Earlier that morning, Chaffee had sent out a reconnaissance party of cavalry as he prepared to move his troops to the advance line. Within the

hour, the interpreter accompanying the cavalry had raced back and reported the party was surrounded by Chinese cavalry. Chaffee had advanced with a battalion of the 14th Infantry to relieve the cavalry and continued toward the city, where he discovered the Russian troops in action along with the Japanese. Holding his position, he directed the rest of his force to move in on Beijing.³⁰³

Companies E and H of the 14th Infantry, under the command of Colonel Daggett, advanced to the north wall of the outer city. However, the remaining 200 yards to the Dongbianmen were exposed to heavy fire from the east side of the Tartar Wall. To reach the gate, the Americans needed to clear the Chinese from the wall.³⁰⁴

The 14th Regiment had no ladders, ropes, or tools, but discovered bricks had fallen from the outer city wall, leaving cavities and projections that could serve as handholds. A call for a volunteer to scale the wall went out, and Bugler Calvin P. Titus of Company E said, "I will try." The Americans watched in breathless silence as Titus climbed to the top. His head neared an embrasure, and Colonel Daggett worried the opening would "blaze with fire" as Titus attempted to enter it, or perhaps rifle butts would "crush his skull." Luckily, none of Daggett's fears materialized. Titus entered the embrasure, and Captain Henry G. Learnard was next to make the ascent, followed by several more men. When Chinese troops atop the wall discovered the 14th Regiment's presence, rifle fire flew from two directions and artillery fire from a third. The Americans atop the wall lowered cords, which the men on the ground tied to rifles and ammunition belts. Then, they drew up their weapons and returned fire.³⁰⁵

The men atop the wall now worried the allies might mistake them for Chinese. Private Detrick rode his horse through a "terrific fire" to fetch the American flag and returned through the same route at 1103 local time.³⁰⁶ By then, 15 to 20 American soldiers were atop the wall and drew up the flag with a cord. Colonel Daggett wrote, "As that flag was unfurled and stood out against that August sky, there went up to heaven a shout of triumph that Spartans might have envied."³⁰⁷

The American flag quickly became a target for Chinese artillery. Protected by U.S. Marines from Companies A and H, Captain Reilly's light battery forced its way through the Russians crowding the Dongbianmen

and shelled the Chinese positions. The 14th Regiment advanced through the outer city, the 9th Regiment following. The marines remained behind, guarding the Americans' wagons. The Army regiments moved west along a street parallel with the Tartar Wall, behind which lay the Legation Quarter. Leading the advance was Colonel Daggett with Companies E and G. At each city block, Daggett's soldiers met heavy fire, and at 1500 they halted to wait for the rest of their regiment, their ammunition exhausted. At 1600, Lieutenant Charles N. Murphy spied a flag waving atop the Tartar Wall. It belonged to a U.S. Marine, who called out that the 14th Regiment could pass through the water gate—the very gate the American legation guard had held for an entire month in anticipation of the relief force's arrival.³⁰⁸

The 14th Infantry entered the Legation Quarter to a “great disappointment.”³⁰⁹ A British Sikh regiment had gotten there first.³¹⁰ The British forces had not arrived at the outer walls until noon, by which time the Americans had scaled the wall and cleared it of Chinese troops, allowing the British to enter their assigned gate without opposition. Later, Daggett would suggest the Americans may have won the race to the Legation Quarter had Companies E and G not exhausted their ammunition. “As it was,” Daggett wrote, “they did the fighting and the British gathered the fruits.”³¹¹

The American casualties on 14 August were 11 wounded. Captain Smedley Butler, U.S. Marine Corps, was among the wounded, struck in the chest by a bullet while leading a platoon onto the wall. The bullet hit a heavy metal button on Butler's shirt, which saved his life. That night, Company F of the 14th Regiment stood guard atop the Tartar Wall near the Zhengyangmen, the gate guarding the main entrance to the inner city. The rest of the American force made camp outside the Tartar Wall.³¹² Major Waller went to sleep with a bottle of scotch under his pillow, but some who knew it was there decided they were in desperate need of a drink. First Lieutenant Frederic Wise Jr. stole the bottle from under Waller's head without waking him, then replaced the emptied bottle. The marines chewed coffee beans to cover their tracks.³¹³

The allies had breached the outer wall and the Tartar Wall, but Beijing was a city of walls. Within the Tartar City was the Imperial City,

surrounded by the Imperial Wall, and within that, the walls of the Forbidden City, so named because entrance was forbidden to commoners. Unbeknownst to the allies, in the early morning of 15 August, Empress Dowager Cixi and her court fled the Forbidden City, disguised as peasants.³¹⁴



Above: View from the Zhengyangmen, looking north to the Imperial City gates, and beyond, the Forbidden City gates. (Upham, folder 11, Personal Papers Collection.)
Left: Imperial City gate. (LC, LC-DIG-stereo-1s19472.) *Right:* Forbidden City gate. (LC, LC-DIG-stereo-1s19600.)

Later that morning, at around 0700, the Americans alone attacked the Imperial City. The night before, a squabble had occurred between General Chaffee and General Linevich over who could hold the Zhengyangmen and enter the Tartar City first. Secretary Squiers and the Russian secretary had intervened and decided that if the Russians were ready at 0700, they could go first. When the sun rose, there was no movement from the Russian camp.

The marines led the way, clearing barricades on the Tartar Wall so that four pieces of artillery could fire from the pagoda atop the Zhengyangmen. The marines had orders to capture flags mounted on the Chinese position atop the west gate of the Tartar Wall, but these were revoked when the Chinese opened heavy fire from a gate to the north. Two of Reilly's artillery pieces fired on the gate, driving out the troops, but in the exchange, as Captain Reilly gave an order, he was struck in the mouth by a bullet, dying at Major Waller's side.³¹⁵ Waller wrote of Reilly, "A braver soldier, a truer friend never breathed than this admirable and lamented officer. He died at my side, touching me at the moment of the blow. He died without murmur or groan."³¹⁶



Rear of the Zhengyangmen. The walls are built double, creating a courtyard-like space between the inner and outer gate. (Upham, folder 11, Personal Papers Collection.)

The 14th Regiment, followed by the 9th, pressed deeper into the city. When they encountered walls, Lieutenant Charles Summerall of Reilly's battery blew open their gates by shelling them at close range. Each gate opened onto an extravagant courtyard, from which Chinese troops welcomed their foreign visitors with a heavy fire. The Americans blasted their way through three walls, battled their way through three courtyards, and arrived at a fourth wall. Peering through the gaps of the wall's gates, they glimpsed the Forbidden City. They were about to position their guns and blow their way in when an aide arrived with a message to withdraw.³¹⁷ Daggett lamented, "To the soldier, who looks only to the accomplishment of his object, there could not have been a greater disappointment. . . . Five minutes' time only intervened between those victorious soldiers and the fruits of their sacrifices."³¹⁸ He did concede that "doubtless there were good diplomatic reasons why the Americans should not enter the Forbidden City that day."³¹⁹

The Americans withdrew to outside the Tartar Wall, the marines holding their position on the Zhengyangmen. The casualties of the day were two enlisted men killed and four wounded in the 9th Infantry, three enlisted killed and 14 wounded in the 14th Infantry, and in Reilly's battery, one enlisted man wounded and the beloved captain killed.³²⁰



The body of Captain Henry J. Reilly lying in the Zhengyangmen, surrounded by his men. (Upham, folder 11, Personal Papers Collection.)

In a conference that afternoon, the generals present decided not to occupy the Imperial City. However, the next day, the foreign ministers pressed for its occupation, and the generals conceded. Chaffee stationed a detachment from the 9th within the Imperial City and a guard at the gate of the Forbidden City with instructions to allow no one to enter.³²¹

The ministers and generals were conflicted over what to do about the sacred Forbidden City. Some were in favor of entering, arguing that otherwise the Chinese might believe their gods had prevented the foreigners from stepping foot inside. Others countered that to enter would “crush the spirit of the Chinese.”³²² Ultimately, the allies decided they would not occupy the city, but they would enter it with a column marching from the south gate to the north. On 15 August, shortly after the end of the relief campaign, the Austrian, German, and Italian contingents had arrived in Beijing, and in late August, reinforcements had increased the allied strength to about 40,000.³²³ Rather than march every man through the city, small detachments were chosen in proportion to the number of troops present. The two Marine Corps battalions of the relief force were each represented by a company, one commanded by Captain Smedley Butler, the other by Captain Wendell Neville.³²⁴ As for the order of the nations, Japan had led the advance to Beijing and had the largest number of troops present. However, Russia insisted on marching first. Japan yielded after “some controversy,” and the order was as follows: Russia, Japan, Great Britain, the United States, France, Germany, Italy, and finally Austria-Hungary.³²⁵ At 0900 on 28 August, the gates to the Forbidden City swung open and the detachments marched through:

They flung to the breeze as many different national colors; they maneuvered by different systems of tactics; their bands played music peculiar to each nation; the trumpet-calls were odd and strange; only two of them spoke the same language; and yet, when put in motion, military training brought about sufficient unity of movement in this body of troops. . . . When the rear of the column had passed through the north gate, all the gates were closed, and no traces of that memorable march were left behind.³²⁶



Parade of the allies into the Forbidden City. (NHHC, NH-2796.)

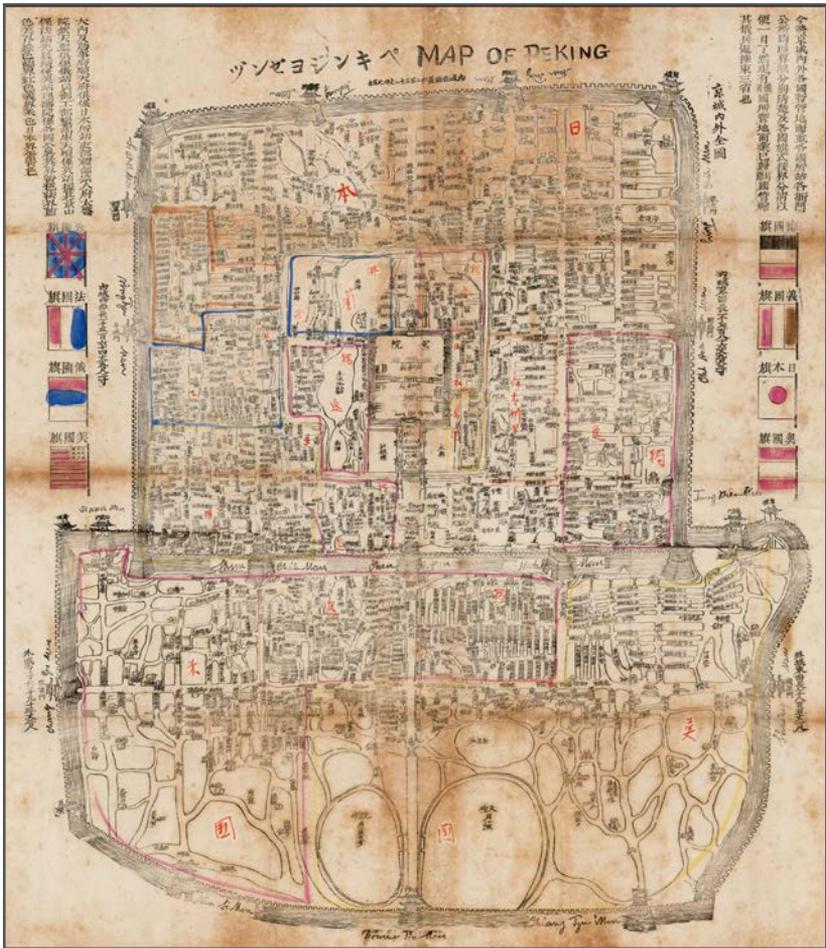
AFTERMATH, 1900–1911

The allies quickly divided Beijing and imposed martial law. The U.S. Army occupied the west half of the outer city, and the U.S. Marines, with Major Waller as provost marshal, oversaw a section of the inner city east of the Imperial City.³²⁷ As at Tianjin, looting in Beijing became rampant and difficult to control. Daggett confirmed this in his account: “Was there looting in Peking? Yes. Did Americans loot? Yes.”³²⁸ One Marine Corps private, Stephan Dwyar, was charged with rape and assault. General Chaffee cracked down hard on such cases, and Dwyar was sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment at Alcatraz.³²⁹

Under Chaffee, the American occupiers provided vaccinations, enforced sanitation rules, sponsored homeless shelters and food kitchens, and set up medical checkups for prostitutes. Chinese inhabitants moved into the American sector from other parts of Beijing, resulting in a housing shortage.³³⁰ Outside both Beijing and Tianjin, pockets of Boxers still operated, and in August and September, U.S. Army and British troops allied to suppress them.³³¹



U.S. food distributing station, Beijing, c. 1900.
(LC, LC-DIG-stereo-1s19628.)



Map of Beijing hastily created by the Japanese army shortly after the allied occupation. Colored outlines show the areas of the city controlled by each nation. (Barry Lawrence Ruderman Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.)

After a year's worth of negotiations between the allies and the Chinese, a treaty known as the Boxer Protocol was signed in September 1901. The Chinese were represented by the experienced diplomat Li Hongzhang (Li Hung-chang) and the moderate Prince Qing. Li had requested Ronglu also negotiate for the Chinese, but the allies had refused due to Ronglu's role in attacking the legations.³³²

The signed Boxer Protocol mandated that the Chinese would have to pay an indemnity of 450 million taels (about 350 million U.S. gold dollars) over 39 years, a tael for each of China's estimated population of 450 million. The Russians took home the largest share, over 28 percent, while the Americans received about 7 percent, approximately \$25 million. However, the United States only required half this amount to pay off expenses incurred for the Boxer Rebellion. In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt agreed to return the excess indemnity to China on the condition the funds were dedicated to scholarships for Chinese students to study in the United States. Six years prior, in 1902, the United States had returned the \$376,300 from the sale of the silver bullion taken from Tianjin. At the end of the 39-year period, in 1940, the Chinese government had paid an estimated \$600–\$700 million to the foreign powers due to the accrual of interest.³³³

The Boxer Protocol also further opened China to foreign influence. The Chinese had to destroy the Dagu Forts, allow foreign powers to occupy points along the Hai River, comply with a two-year ban on weapons imports, and grant the foreign powers exclusive control of the Legation Quarter. In addition, the Boxer Protocol exacted punishment on pro-Boxer Chinese leaders. Qing officials had crafted an alternate history in which Empress Dowager Cixi had been held captive in her court, forced to back the Boxers against her will. Prince Duan, the conservative head of the Zongli Yamen, became the Qing dynasty's scapegoat.³³⁴ The foreign powers urged the death penalty for both Duan and General Dong Fuxiang, but the Chinese asked for leniency. Duan was exiled to Turkestan, but instead retired to the residence of a Mongol prince in Ningxia (Ningsia). General Dong Fuxiang was stripped of his honors and office and exiled to Gansu Province, but allowed to command a small army of 5,000 men.³³⁵ Meanwhile, some junior courtiers were condemned to commit suicide, and those who had already died were subject to "posthumous degradation."³³⁶ To atone for the murders of German minister Baron Clemens von Ketteler and Japanese chancellor Sugiyama Akira, Chinese ambassadors had to travel to Germany and Japan to apologize. Furthermore, the Chinese were required to erect a monument for von Ketteler at the location of his assassination with an inscription expressing regret in Latin, German, and Chinese.³³⁷



Monument for Baron Clemens von Ketteler, which stood on Hatamen Street from 1903 to 1918. (Special Collections, University of Bristol Library, WC01-106.)

In January 1902, Empress Dowager Cixi returned with her court to Beijing and began to implement the reforms that in 1898 had led her to overthrow her nephew and execute his advisors. The following year, Cixi's childhood friend and trusted advisor Ronglu passed away. Days before her own death in 1908, Cixi chose Ronglu's grandson as her heir. The Boxer Rebellion had weakened the Chinese central government, and only a few years into the young emperor's reign, the 1911 Revolution ended China's last imperial dynasty and established the Republic of China.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

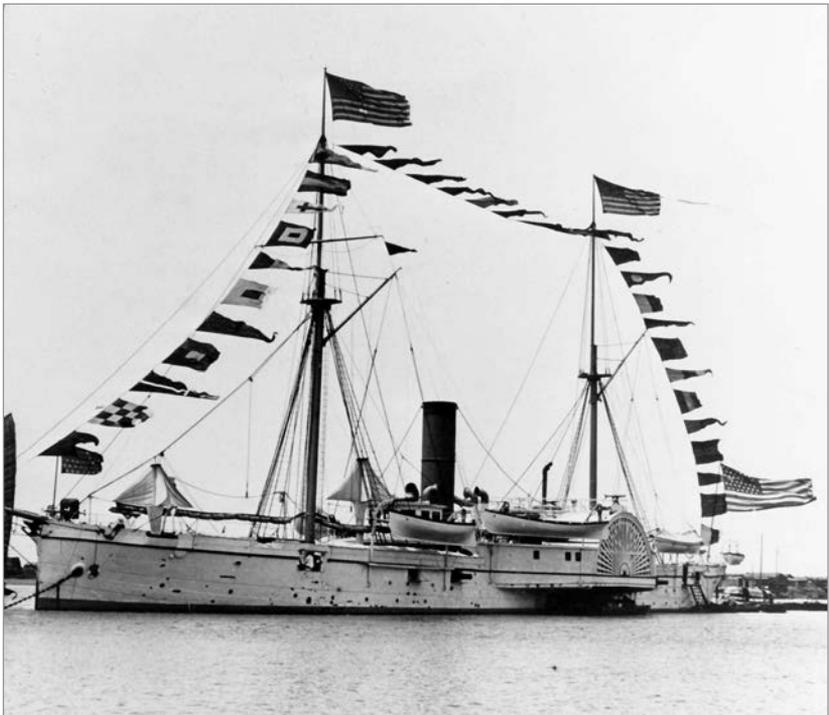
Twenty-two sailors, 33 marines, and 4 soldiers earned Medals of Honor for their actions during the Boxer Rebellion.³³⁸ Navy and Marine Corps officers were not eligible for the Medal of Honor until 1915, and so distinguished officers were advanced precedence numbers in rank. Captain Bowman McCalla was advanced three precedence numbers, Captain John Myers was advanced four numbers and brevetted a major, and Major Littleton Waller was advanced two numbers and brevetted a lieutenant colonel. Despite the controversy of his cowardice charges, Captain Newt Hall was brevetted a major.³³⁹ Lieutenant Smedley Butler, who was brevetted a captain and advanced two numbers, would go on to join Private Dan Daly as one of only two marines to receive a Medal of Honor for separate actions, the first at Veracruz in 1914 and the second at Haiti in 1915. Three marines involved in the relief of the legations—Major William P. Biddle, Captain Wendell C. Neville, and Captain Ben H. Fuller—would go on to serve as commandant of the Marine Corps.³⁴⁰



Medals of Honor for Ordinary Seaman Samuel McAllister (*left*) and Coxswain Karl Thomas (*right*). (Folder 13: Medal of Honor, box S-160, S Collection, NDL.)

On 27 June 1908, the China Relief Expedition Medal was authorized for officers and enlisted Navy and Marine Corps personnel who had served on shore in China from 24 May 1900 to 27 May 1901 or aboard any of 11 vessels that saw service in theater, including *Brooklyn*, *Monocacy*, *Nashville*, *New Orleans*, *Newark*, *Solace*, and *Wheeling*.³⁴¹

After the allies occupied Beijing, the Navy reduced its presence in Dagu, but did not disappear entirely from China. *Monocacy*, which had played a critical logistical role at Tanggu, went into a mud dock in the Hai River during the winter. *New Orleans* also remained in North China, assisting the Army and transporting mail from Nagasaki. Two monitors with full complements were stationed permanently in China, *Monadnock* at Shanghai and *Monterey* at Guangzhou (Canton).³⁴² Owing to increased American-flagged shipping on the Yangtze—particularly in the oil and kerosene trade—the Navy restarted the Yangtze River Patrol as part of the newly reorganized Asiatic Fleet. U.S. Navy river gunboats built for service on the Yangtze, including the second *Monocacy* (Gunboat No. 20), patrolled up the river as far as Chongqing (Chungking) until the outbreak of the Pacific War with Japan effectively ended the mission.³⁴³



Monocacy in full dress in the Hai River, Tianjin, c. 1900. (NHHC, NH-100314.)

On 11 October 1900, all U.S. Marines were withdrawn from China. In total, 1,200 U.S. Marines—49 officers and 1,151 enlisted men—had been sent to China for the Boxer Rebellion. The 14th Infantry departed Beijing shortly after, on 19 October, and the 9th remained to occupy the southwest quarter of Beijing, their camp in the Temple of Agriculture. On 19 May 1901, General Chaffee marched his soldiers from the quarter they had occupied for almost a year, and the China Relief Expedition came to an end. Only Company B of the 9th Infantry remained behind as the guard of the U.S. legation, a departure from the custom of assigning legation duty to the Marine Corps.³⁴⁴ “Army troops are never supposed to be sent to a foreign country except in time of war,” the commandant of the Marine Corps wrote in 1901.³⁴⁵ He concluded, “It is eminently proper that the guard to be kept at the legation in Peking should be furnished by the Marine Corps.”³⁴⁶ In 1905, a detachment of 300 marines replaced the Army soldiers at the request of U.S. minister William W. Rockhill. On 13 February 1908, the marines paraded in front of the U.S. legation gateway for the unveiling of six bronze memorial tablets commemorating the soldiers, sailors, and marines who had served to defend and relieve the legations. Another bronze tablet was installed in Tianjin in the office of the American consul. The marines would guard the U.S. legation, which their service had bravely defended for 55 days, until a month before Pearl Harbor.³⁴⁷



Marines in formation in front of the U.S. legation barracks, Beijing, c. 1900. (LC, LC-USZ62-137034.)

LESSONS LEARNED

The Boxer Rebellion may have been a small war, but it was the American military's first taste of coalition warfare. The allied commanders cooperated (for the most part) despite rivalries, tactical disagreements, and language barriers. The nations were especially cohesive when survival was paramount. As Boxers set fire to Beijing's churches and foreign shops, the Americans and Russians in the Legation Quarter communicated with hand signals to build a shared barricade and bonded over tea from the Russian samovar. However, when the Legation Quarter had been relieved, the two nations' generals argued over who would lead the attack on the Imperial City. The officers of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps had been thrust into the role of diplomat without the appropriate foreign language skills or understanding of each nation's cultural differences and imperial ambitions, underscoring the necessity of officers with international affairs expertise and regional specialties as America became a player on the global stage.

Greater understanding was needed not only of the allies but also of the Chinese. The American officers were dangerously misinformed about their opponents, their views warped by ignorance and prejudice. Captain Myers's belief that a fear of "spirit soldiers" prevented the Chinese from destroying the Legation Quarter illustrates his primitive view of the Qing soldiers and officers. Captain McCalla's surprise when he discovered the imperial troops were well dressed and possessed modern weapons implies he had expected the opposite. American officers in theater lacked basic situational awareness of the Guards Army's officers, tactics, and resources, yet American companies had been supplying China with munitions for several years. This intelligence gap suggests the Navy, and perhaps its fairly new Office of Naval Intelligence, may not have considered China a serious enough threat. Underestimating the enemy nearly led to the Seymour Expedition's defeat, and though the allies were saved by stumbling upon the Xigu Arsenal, they should have known of its existence given its proximity to Tianjin's foreign concessions.

In addition to highlighting educational and intelligence gaps, the Boxer Rebellion revealed the need for allied nations to establish protocols and develop personnel for coalition operations. During the Seymour

Expedition, the allies had packed onto their various train cars and trundled through the countryside with no thought to a system of central command. Captain McCalla's concern had been over the Americans riding in the first car, not how his force might cooperate to achieve the allies' shared goal. It was only after a small-scale Boxer attack that Admiral Seymour realized the necessity for order and established a commander of each train car.

When the allied commanders did convene to discuss operations, they lacked both a framework and centralized staff for effective planning, and so every decision became a negotiation fraught with dramatic declarations and nations relying on troop numbers and artillery as leverage. Both Captain McCalla and General Chaffee were recorded to have lost their patience at such meetings, declaring the Americans would march on alone. While the allies navigated decision-making through votes, and, at times, ultimatums, ineffective meetings took time away from necessary planning, leading to blunders in the heat of battle. At Tianjin, the 9th Regiment sustained heavy casualties due to ambiguous directions, and at Yangcun, the 14th suffered over a small but deadly miscalculation.

Greater coordination was needed not only among the allied nations but also among the branches of the U.S. military. In 1900, no overall command existed to coordinate operations among the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. The Joint Army and Navy Board would not be established until 1903, in reaction to disorganized joint operations during the Spanish-American War. While the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps carried out joint operations during the Boxer Rebellion without a major hitch, favoritism was evident in General Chaffee's orders during the China Relief Expedition. It was the 14th Infantry, followed by the 9th, that relieved the Legation Quarter while the marines remained behind to guard the wagons, and the next day, it was the 14th and 9th that came minutes from blasting their way into the Forbidden City. Furthermore, Army personnel formed the initial permanent guard at the U.S. legation, though it had been defended by sailors and marines for 55 days. In 1905, when the marines replaced the Army guard, Chaffee challenged the U.S. minister in Beijing on the decision, an exchange foreshadowing the tension that would persist between the Marine Corps and Army in China as the Army tried, and

failed, to bring the Marine Corps under its command. The friction between the two independent forces, lasting until the Army withdrew from China in 1938, would have been reduced by a unified regional chain of command.³⁴⁸

The operations of the War Department and Navy Department in China were further complicated by the presence of another U.S. government agency: the State Department. How U.S. officers engaged with the State Department's representative, U.S. minister Conger, was a matter of personal discretion. Myers had split his force at the request of Conger, though the action went against the orders of McCalla, a higher-ranking officer. In contrast, Hall had refused Conger's requests on enough occasions that he was accused of cowardice. The siege of the Legation Quarter demonstrated that closer coordination between the Navy Department and State Department was critical, especially on the question of what authority U.S. diplomats could exercise over marine legation guards.

That the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps had successfully carried out joint and coalition operations during the Boxer Rebellion without adequate education, intelligence, protocols, staffing, and higher-level coordination was a testament to the officers on the ground. Captain McCalla secured the survival of the Seymour Expedition by urging the column to "push on," and at Tianjin, Major Waller had earned the respect and gratitude of the allied nations through strategic decisions in the heat of battle. Especially crucial to the operations of the U.S. services, and the allied nations, was Commander Frederick Wise, who coordinated logistics at the Tanggu station. Under Wise, *Monocacy's* sailors executed the movement of thousands of troops necessary to face the superior strength of the Qing soldiers and their countless Boxer allies.

The U.S. Navy sailors in China had fought in the face of seemingly impossible odds, and luck was on their side. The Xigu Arsenal had saved the Seymour Expedition from a very different fate, and the Legation Quarter may have survived due to the reservations of the Qing empire's commander in chief. But it had not all been serendipity. The sailors had adapted. In the Legation Quarter, Gunner's Mate Joseph Mitchell put his skills to work fashioning and firing the International Gun. Outside Beijing's walls, machinist's mates and water tenders from *Monocacy* nursed

locomotive engines to life, and sailors regardless of rating lugged railroad ties to repair tracks torn up by Boxers. Train cars became the Navy's ships and destroyed railroads its choppy seas, proving that what defined the Navy was not its physical assets but its sailors.

NOTES

- 1 Chinese words have been romanized according to the Pinyin system, the modern standard used by the U.S. government. The twentieth-century equivalents of these Pinyin words are listed in parentheses on first mention to aid readers' understanding of primary sources. For most geographical names, the alternate spellings come from the *Postal Atlas of China* while the historic counterparts of other names are spelled using the Wade-Giles system.
- 2 Peter C. Perdue, "The First Opium War: The Anglo-Chinese War of 1839–1842," MIT Visualizing Cultures, last modified 2011, https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/opium_wars_01/ow1_essay01.html.
- 3 Perdue, "The First Opium War: The Anglo-Chinese War of 1839–1842."
- 4 David J. Silbey, *The Boxer Rebellion and the Great Game in China* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 24–28; "The Opening to China Part I," Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, United States Department of State, accessed 21 June 2022, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/china-1>.
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- 145 After the siege, the U.S. legation guard left the International Gun in Beijing on the condition that it would be placed at the base of a monument to Minister von Ketteler. Instead, the other nations claimed their parts and the cannon barrel remained lying in the Legation Quarter until July 1901, when it was shipped to Nagasaki and then on to West Point. When Captain McCalla caught wind of the gun's final destination, he wrote an indignant letter to the Secretary of the Navy. The Navy Department forwarded McCalla's letter to the War Department, prompting an investigation that examined statements from Captain Myers and Minister MacDonald to establish the gun's Navy connection to Gunner's Mate Mitchell. In May 1902, the War Department ordered the gun be sent to the U.S. Naval Academy, where it remains to this day. USNAM 1902.001, Accession Records, U.S. Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Maryland.
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- 166 “Mr. Conger Accuses Captain of Marines,” *New York Times*, 28 October 1900, 1; “The Case of Capt. Hall,” *New York Times*, 9 October 1901, 9. Conger brought three charges against Hall: refusing to hold a portion of the Tartar Wall, refusing to perform

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- 168 “Report of Captain Newt T. Hall,” in “Peking: Report of Captain John T. Myers,” NHHC.
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- 170 Boxer Rebellion Medal of Honor Citation (PDF), 19 July 1901, in “Sergeant Major Daniel ‘Dan’ Joseph Daly, USMC (Deceased),” Marine Corps University, accessed 1 February 2022.
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- 172 Haiti Medal of Honor Citation (PDF), in “Sergeant Major Daniel ‘Dan’ Joseph Daly, USMC (Deceased),” Marine Corps University.
- 173 “U.S. Marines in the Boxer Rebellion, Part 2: Private Harry Fisher’s True Identity,” *Prologue* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1999), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1999/winter/boxer-rebellion-2.html>. After Phillips’s death, his mother wrote to the commandant of the Marine Corps requesting the rolls be corrected with her son’s true name. Her request was denied, and she accepted Phillips’s Medal of Honor under his alias. It was not until 1988, after requests from congressmen, that the commandant of the Marine Corps ordered records at Headquarters Marine Corps and the National Archives be changed to reflect Phillips’s name. Also in 1988, the maritime prepositioning ship MV *Private Harry Fisher* was renamed MV *Private Franklin J. Phillips*.
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