



MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

Boxer Rebellion, 1899–1901

At the turn of the 20th century, the United States pushed its influence beyond its shores to secure access to global markets and resources. Territorial acquisitions after the Spanish-American War initiated a transformative period for U.S. naval forces, which now had the mission of protecting a vast maritime sphere of influence. Following the annexation of the Philippines in 1898, the nation gained a foothold in the Western Pacific, enabling it to play a more active role in Asian affairs. From this new position of influence, the United States pursued formal trade relations with China. In September 1899, Secretary of State John M. Hay introduced the Open Door Policy, an effort to guarantee equal access to Chinese markets for all foreign powers while preserving China's sovereignty. This policy emerged during a time when several imperial nations had established exclusive concessions and spheres of influence throughout China.



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In response to the growing foreign encroachment, a nationalist, anti-imperialist group called the Boxers sparked an uprising that quickly grew into a mass movement. Supported by the Chinese government, the Boxers operated alongside Chinese troops and sought to expel foreigners. On 28 May 1900, they attacked and destroyed several railroad stations and shops near Peking. As anti-Western sentiment escalated, the

International Legation in Peking (the area of the city where foreign diplomatic compounds were located, a.k.a. the Legation Quarter) requested military assistance. On 29 May, the United States sent a detachment of Marines and sailors from cruiser USS *Newark* (C 1) and battleship USS

Collect

Preserve

Promote

Support

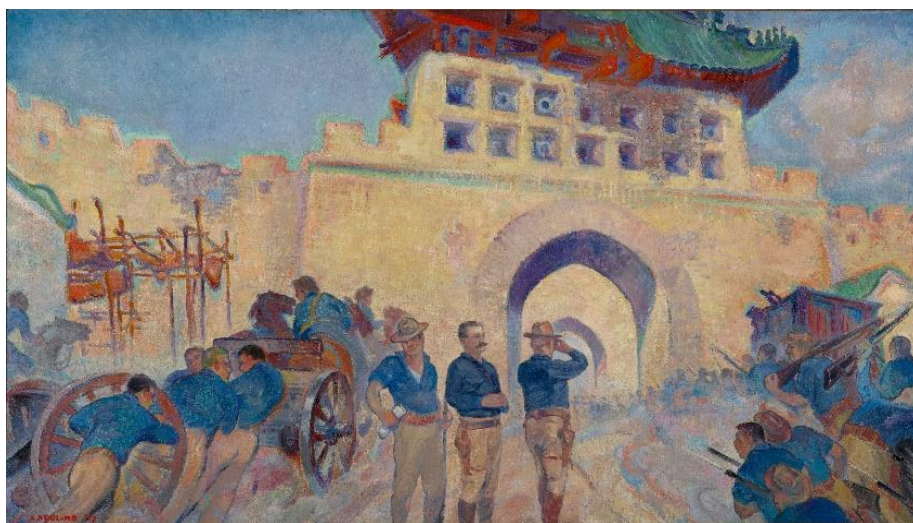




Oregon (BB 3) to Tientsin. In short order, British, Austrian, German, French, Italian, Japanese, and Russian forces also arrived.

On 31 May, a Marine force led by Captains John T. Myers and Newt H. Hall joined an international expedition traveling about 100 kilometers by train from Tientsin to Peking. After their arrival, representatives of the Peking legation met the Marines while thousands of Chinese civilians silently observed the Marines march into the city. On 5 June, the Boxers cut off rail transportation between Tientsin and Peking. Five days later, a multinational relief force commanded by British Vice Admiral Sir Edward Seymour left Tientsin to break through to Peking. The Seymour Expedition encountered stiff resistance, became surrounded, and suffered more than 20 percent casualties. Unable to advance to Peking, the 2,000 troops (including 112 U.S. Marines and sailors) unsuccessfully attempted to return to Tientsin. The Westerners became trapped in two places and isolated from their port base of Tientsin for the better part of a month.

By the end of June, additional forces arrived in Tientsin to relieve the Seymour Expedition. Among them was a detachment of 8 officers and 130 Marines from the Philippines led by Major Waller. For two days, the Marines and a column of British and



Waller at Peiping by LtCol John J. Capolino.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection

Russian troops attempted to fight their way to Seymour's force. By 26 June, the combined force rescued the expedition and returned to Tientsin. Within five days, Major Waller's Marines had marched more than 150 kilometers with little rest and one meal per day. Despite continued resistance, Western forces defeated the Boxer force in Tientsin by mid-July.



Meanwhile, on 20 June in Peking, Chinese rioters killed a German diplomat, signaling



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the beginning of an all-out siege on the Legation Quarter. The next day, the Chinese government declared war on foreign powers. During the siege, Marines manned sections of the legation's walls in 48-hour shifts. The Chinese built barricades toward the walls and kept the defenders under continuous artillery and rifle fire while the Marines improved their positions, sometimes under fire. On the night of 15 July, Private Daniel J. Daly singlehandedly defended his position against Chinese attacks, a feat for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

By early August, 18,600 reinforcements arrived at Tientsin, including U.S. Army soldiers and more Marines from the Philippines, and began fighting their way to Peking. They reached the city's outskirts on 13 August and began their assault. By late afternoon, they had relieved the legation, ending the siege. The next day, allied forces attacked the imperial city (a walled section of Peking associated with Chinese imperial rulers and usually off-limits to foreigners), driving out the remaining Boxers taking refuge there. The Marines remained in Peking until 28 September, after which they departed for the Philippines. The U.S. Army established a legation guard in Peking, much to the displeasure of Commandant Charles Heywood, who had argued that guarding the Legation Quarter should have remained a Marine Corps responsibility.

- For more information, see:
 - [*Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*](#)