



The Boxer Rebellion in China

Keystone Battle Series
Marine Corps History
Division

Overview

Background:

Why were Americans in China in the first place?

What caused the Boxer Rebellion?

Chronology of Events

Defending the Legation Quarter

The Siege of Peking

Defending the Tartar Wall

The Seymour Expedition

The Seizure of Tientsin

The March to Peking

Conclusion and Discussion

So What? Why does any of this matter?

Conclusion: China after the Boxer Rebellion
and the Road to World War II



“Boxer” soldier with spear and flag in Peking City during the Siege, Summer 1900

The USMC in 1900: Size & Missions

- A tiny Marine Corps!
Just 157 Officers and 5,500 men
- Major duties: Guarding naval installations and serving as ships' guards to provide good order and discipline while underway.
- Occasionally, Marines went ashore on “punitive expeditions” to punish those who attacked American businessmen, ships, or otherwise “insulted the flag.”



Right: Two views of Ships' Guards aboard vessels of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet in the early 20th Century

Causes of the Boxer Rebellion

- Throughout the 19th Century, foreign naval vessels often clashed with the Chinese Government over whether foreign merchants could conduct maritime trade in China.
- Great Britain's navy fought two "Opium Wars" over the "right" to sell opium in China. (The British claimed selling drugs was part of free trade; the Chinese disagreed.)
- In 1861, the U.S. and other Western Powers signed the Treaty of Tientsin with the Chinese Emperor, which gave the Americans, British, French, and Russians the right to:
 - Open businesses in China and run them from "legation quarters" (walled western neighborhoods) inside Peking
 - Send merchant ships and warships up China's rivers
 - Travel throughout China as missionaries, tourists, or for business purposes
 - Have 11 ports remain open at all times for trade.



Depiction of a battle from the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), which killed 30-50 million Chinese. The major dispute in this war concerned the role of foreigners in China.

The Peking (Beijing) Legation Quarter

The Legation Quarter was essentially a walled western City inside China's capitol. Eventually, it would house businessmen from the U.S., United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, Italy and even Japan.

(Note the Marine in the drawing)



The Road to Violence

- The boxers began as an illegal protest movement in China, but the Empress Dowager Xichi (then the head of the weak and troubled Chinese Imperial Government) was too weak to stop them.
- In January 1900, the Chinese Government stopped directly opposing the Boxers. The movement grew, and the US (and other countries) requested to land troops from nearby ships to protect their diplomats and businessmen.
- On 31 May 1900, 50 U.S. Marines and 5 sailors arrive in Peking, along with 300 other foreign troops.



Members of the “Righteous and Harmonious Fists,” whom the Americans called “The Boxers.”

The First to Fight in the Boxer Rebellion

- None of the internationals had foreign bases in China, but their governments all had Navy ships in the nearby port at Taku (115 miles from Peking).
- All of those ships had Marines aboard and these were the majority of the forces that arrived in May 1900.
- Also on the expedition was a Marine Private who would become famous in China: Dan Daly.
- Their job: protect the businessmen and their families while a relief expedition of many more troops arrived from overseas.
- The siege of Peking lasted 55 days.

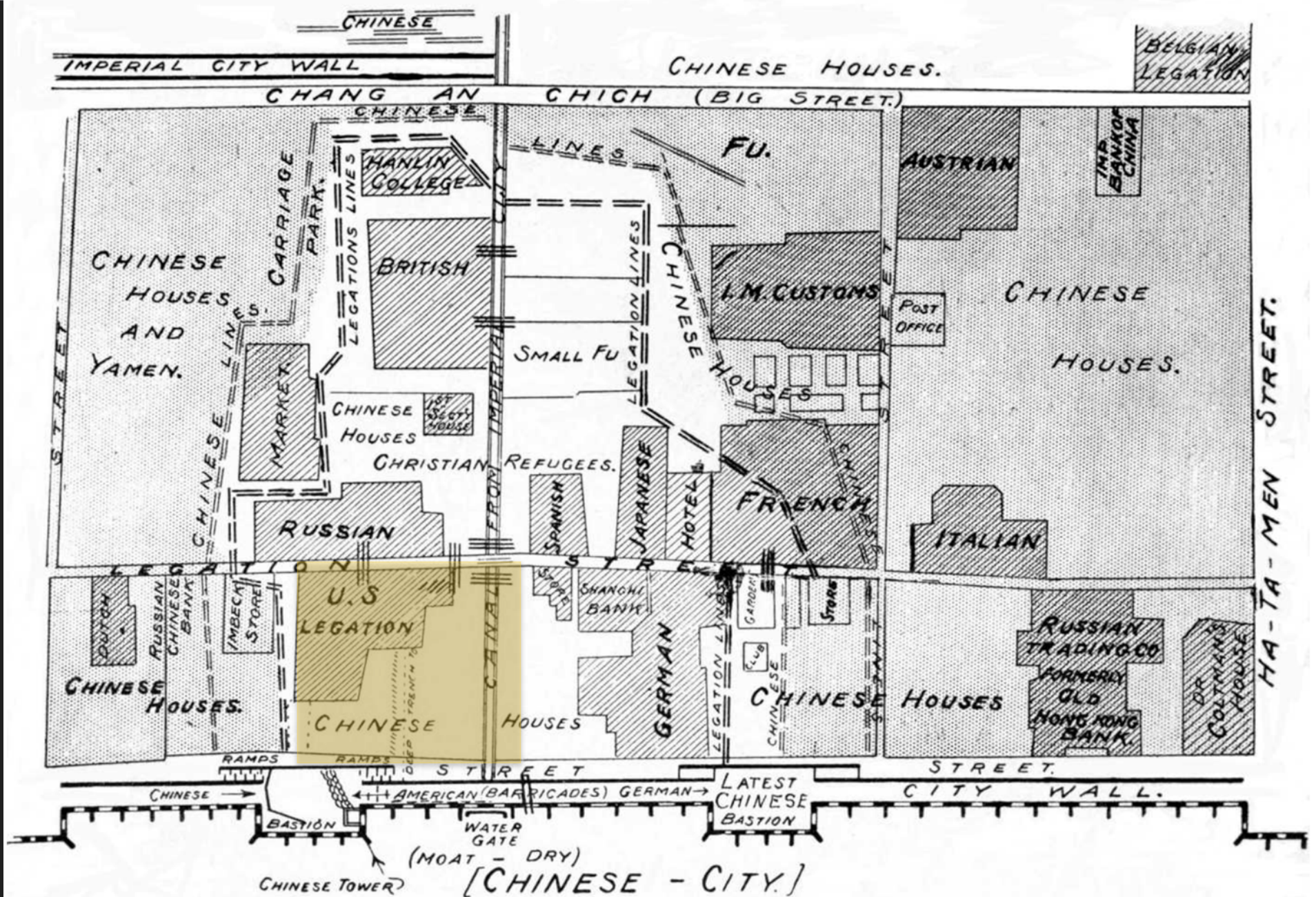


Captain John Twiggs Myers, also known as “Handsome Jack” Myers, commanded the U.S. Marines who first arrived in China in May 1900.

Defending the Quarter

1-20 June 1900

U.S. Legation marked in yellow.
The "Tartar Wall" is along the bottom edge (called the "City Wall" on this map).



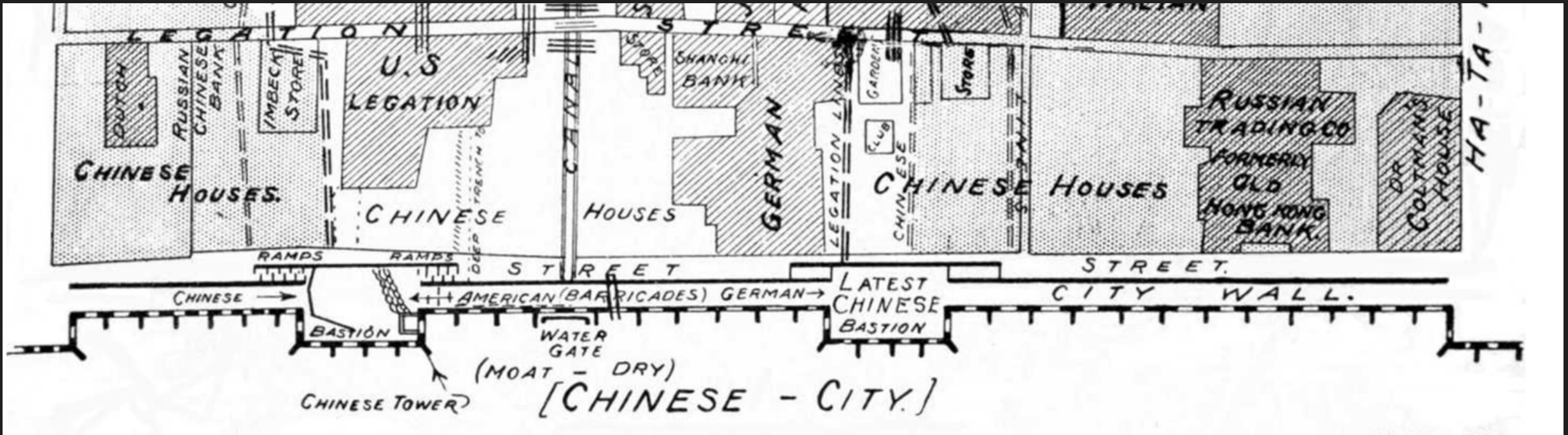
THE LEGATIONS AT PEKING, 1900.

From a sketch by Capt. John T. Myers, U.S. Marine Corps.

(By permission of the Board of Control, U.S. Naval Institute.)

[To face p. 550.]

The Siege of Peking: Defending the Tartar Wall



- Once the siege began, the Marines had to work with troops from several different nations and often had trouble communicating.
- The mission was to guard the southern wall (the Tartar Wall) and ensure the Boxers or Chinese Army couldn't gain access to the settlement.
- This was made difficult by snipers and the towers the Chinese built to be able to get over – or just shoot into – the Legation Quarter.

Who Was Attacking? And How?



The “Gangsu Braves”



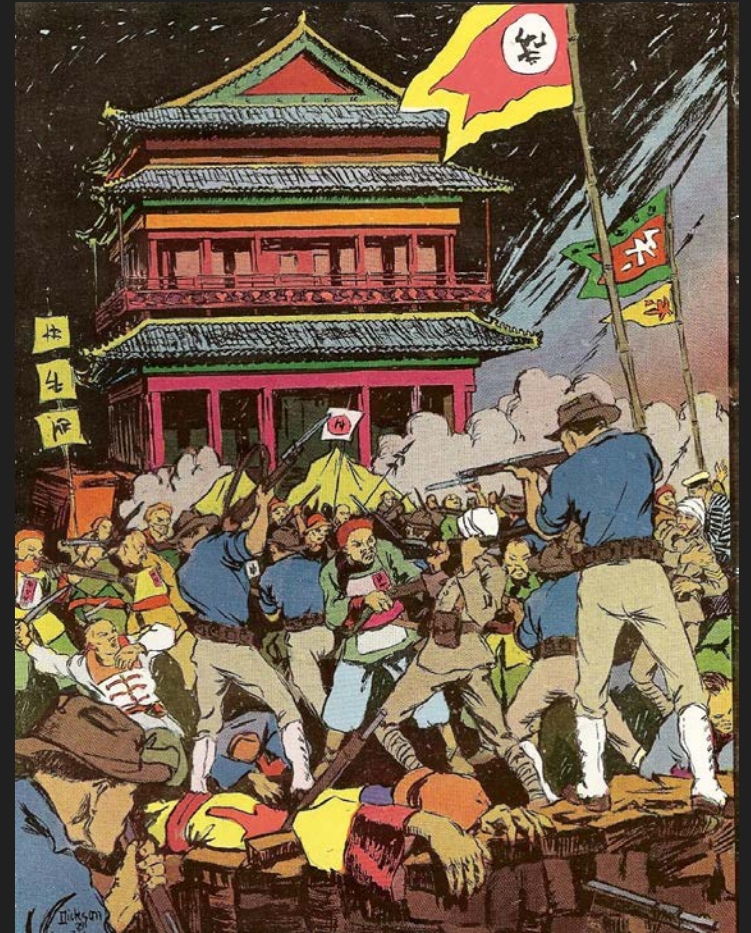
The Peking Field Army (Regulars)

- The irregular “Gangsu Braves” were to the West; the Peking Field Army (regular forces with artillery) were to the East.
- They attacked with fire, direct fire weapons, and built siege towers and barricades to try to get over the 45-foot Tartar Wall.
- The Marines’ position soon became the most vulnerable part of the defenses.

Defending the Tartar Wall: The Counter-Attack on 3 July



View from inside the Legation looking South (note the ramp which was exposed to sniper fire from the West)

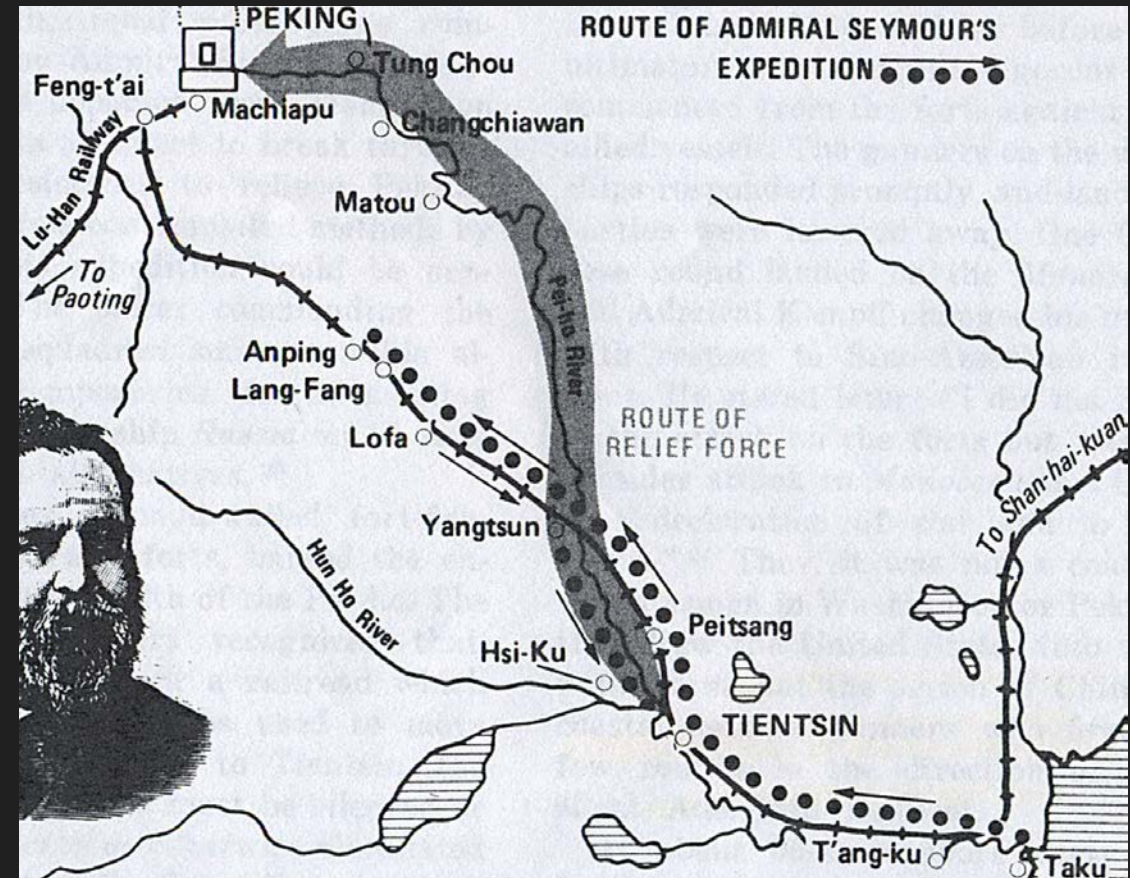


Artistic rendering of the Marines defending the Tartar Wall from Chinese fighting from their towers and barricades

The Seymour Expedition: The Rescuers need Rescuing



Major Littleton W.T. Waller (pictured here as a Colonel) led the Waller Battalion (130 men) that tried to rescue the Seymour Expedition



The route of the Seymour Expedition. (The shaded arrow shows the plan; the dots show the actual route and retreat.)

The Seizure of Tientsin, 13 July 1900



1stLt Smedley Butler participated in the Battle of Tientsin when he was only 18 years old.



Chinese depiction of the Battle for Tientsin, 13 July 1900

The March to Peking



Marines struggle with heat and exhaustion on the march to Peking
4-5 August 1900



The American and British troops get into Peking through a Chinese gate in the Tartar city wall. The stone fort with the American flag on the wall above it, the bastion, held by the American marines during the siege of the Legation.

THE 9th U.S. INFANTRY ENTERING PEKING, AUGUST 15, 1900

DRAWN BY FREDERIC REMINGTON FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY OSCAR KING 'DADIS'

Artistic depiction of U.S. Army troops entering Peking, 15 August 1900

How did it all End?: The Legation Quarter is Relieved



Rather than fight through the gates, U.S. Army soldiers from the Relief Expedition scale the walls of the Legation Quarter in Peking, 15 August 1900



Private Dan Daly earns his first Medal of Honor, 14 Aug 1900

Discussion: So What?

How is the Boxer Rebellion Relevant Today?

- What do you think was the worst part of the Boxer Rebellion for the Marines inside the Legation quarter in Peking? How about for the Relief Expedition? How about for the Chinese in Peking?
- Are there any lessons from this event that are important for Junior Marines?
- Are there any lessons from these events that are important for officers and SNCOs?
- Are there any lessons that are important for NCOs?
- Are there any lessons from this conflict that help us understand the fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan?

China after the Boxer Rebellion: The Road to WWII

- After the battle, China signed a new treaty – The Boxer Protocol – which allowed all of the nations of the International Relief Expedition to permanently station troops in China. (The U.S. stations the 4th Marines there until 1941.)
- The new Chinese Government – still led by the Empress Dowager Cixi – tries to establish positive relations with the Western Businessmen in China, but resentment continues.
- IN 1912, the Qing Empire finally collapses, ending 2,000 years of Imperial Rule in China.
- IN 1927, another civil war breaks out in China that pits urban nationalists (led by Sun Yat Sen) against rural communists (led by Mao Zedong).
- That war continues until 1937, when Japan invades China.
- The U.S. opposes the Japanese invasion of China, and begins negotiations with the Japanese to try to halt the war, which continues.
- On 7 December 1941, Japan breaks off negotiations and attacks the USA at Pearl Harbor.



Prepared by:
LtCol Aaron O'Connell, USMCR, PhD
Field History Branch
Marine Corps History Division
www.history.usmc.mil