

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 15 "Taels I Win" Transcript

[music: fanfare]

In June of 1900, the foreign diplomats in Beijing found themselves cut off from the outside world, and increasingly threatened by the Boxers, an anti-foreign militia of angry teenagers and young men flooding into the city. Worse still, the soldiers sent to relieve them had themselves become trapped, surrounded by angry Boxers and hostile Chinese soldiers, and almost out of supplies and ammunition. Eight governments ordered more soldiers to China, while nervously waiting for news. Something, anything, to tell them whether their people in Beijing are still alive.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 15. Taels I Win.

We left off last time with the diplomats of eleven western nations isolated in the Legation Quarter in Beijing. After one Japanese diplomat was brutally murdered, the ambassadors protested to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, but were told simply that he had been "the victim of bandits". At the same time, the multinational relief force of over 2,000 soldiers has gotten trapped itself between Beijing and Tianjin, almost out of supply and with hundreds of wounded. Neither of these groups can communicate with the other or with the outside world. No one knows their fate.

In Beijing, Boxers began burning down Christian churches and mission buildings. The Protestant missionaries and many of their Chinese converts converged on the Methodist mission, as it was the largest and most easily defended. The lead Methodist missionaries in Beijing at this time were Frank and Mary Gamewell. Frank had been a missionary in China for 20 years, and had already been besieged once before by a hostile mob in Chongqing. Mary had lived in China for 30 years. Now, I know this sounds like a bad Hallmark Channel movie, but the Gamewells had actually had plans to leave China for a vacation trip on June 5, but that was the very day the Boxers cut the train line to Tianjin, and so they were forced to stay.

Frank Gamewell organized the missionaries in defense of the mission. This group would come to be called the "Fighting Parsons". He requested and got 20 Marines from the US embassy to assist the parsons, and the hundreds of Chinese Christians taking refuge at the mission, in constructing trenches and barricades.

The German ambassador, Baron von Ketteler, went for a walk on June 12, and encountered a man dressed like a Boxer, along with a younger boy. Von Ketteler attacked them with his cane. The man escaped, but Von Ketteler grabbed the boy and dragged him back to the German embassy, where he was killed.

News of this attack enraged the already wound-up Boxers. The next day, a mob tried to force its way into the Legation Quarter, but were driven back by American Marines. The day after that, the Germans drove them back. Hundreds of Boxers were killed in these two assaults. Frustrated and outraged, the Boxers fanned out over the rest of the city, attacking Chinese Christians, stores trading in foreign goods, and any other establishment that so much as looked foreign.

On June 15, Boxers also attacked the port city of Tianjin. They began, as usual, by slaughtering Christians and burning churches and stores selling foreign goods. Then they turned their attention to Tianjin's foreign concession neighborhood, where thousands of foreigners lived. It might have been a massacre but for the timely arrival of 1,700 Russian soldiers, and a handful of British and American marines, who marched into the town and barricaded themselves against Boxer attacks. One of the foreign civilians in Tianjin who assisted in building barricades was an American engineer named Herbert Hoover. Hoover later said: "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'". Wait a minute, is that a cue?

[Song: "There'll Be A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight"]

Anyway, the additional foreign soldiers were just barely able to hold the line.

News of the attacks in Tianjin reached the foreign naval squadrons stationed in Bohai the following day, June 16. Now bear in mind that these naval units have heard nothing from their embassies in Beijing, nor from Admiral Seymour's relief expedition, for a week now. This news from Tianjin was doubly worrying. Besides the welfare of the foreigners in Tianjin being threatened, if the Boxers were able to seize control of the city, there would be no hope of reaching either Beijing or Admiral Seymour.

Now, Tianjin is a port city, but it doesn't lie exactly on the coast. It's a few miles inland, reachable along the Hai River. At the mouth of the Hai was then the down of Dagu, and two large forts on either side of the river entrance. In addition to the news from Tianjin, the foreign squadrons could see Chinese regulars reinforcing the forts in an apparent attempt to close off access to the city from the sea. The various commanders met and decided to send an ultimatum to the Chinese: Surrender the Dagu Forts within four hours or we will attack them. The American commander, Admiral Louis Kempff, refused to participate because he felt he lacked the authority to, y'know, start a war.

At 1 A.M. on June 17, one hour before the deadline would have passed, the Chinese forts opened fire on the foreign naval squadrons. Two Russian ships were damaged. As other ships returned fire, two British destroyers slipped past the forts in the confusion, and went upriver to where four modern Chinese destroyers, recently purchased from Germany, were docked. The British boarded the Chinese destroyers and captured them with no casualties.

Back at the forts, a lucky shot from a French ship hit a magazine, creating a huge explosion at one of the forts, which seems to have done a lot of harm to Chinese morale. At dawn, assault teams landed and stormed the forts. By all rights it should have been a bloody failure, but the Chinese fled and the foreigners seized the forts with minimal casualties. Although the Russians, apparently enraged by the hits

on their ships last night, retaliated by sinking an unarmed Chinese merchant ship and then machine gunning the survivors in the water, killing hundreds of innocent Chinese civilians.

What was the Chinese government doing during this time? The Empress Dowager's advisors were divided on whether to support or oppose the Boxer Uprising. The anti-Boxer faction pointed out that the Chinese government had made solemn commitments to these foreign powers to protect their diplomats and citizens in China, and that to fail to fulfill these commitments would likely lead to retribution. The pro-Boxer faction was worried that the government had a tiger by the tail. To oppose the Boxers might very well turn them against the Qing dynasty.

Now as I mentioned before, the Qing dynasty are ethnically Manchu. You may have seen it referred to as the "Manchu dynasty". Manchus are an ethnic minority in China who hail from the far northeastern portion of the country which, unsurprisingly, is called Manchuria. 90% of the population of China are ethnic Han. This is the ethnic group we in the west generally think of when we think of "Chinese", and this is the ethnic group that the Boxers come from. So the possibility that the Boxers might turn on the Qing dynasty and try to restore Han rule if they felt the Qing were not with them in their fight against the foreigners was a very real fear.

The Empress Dowager dithered until she heard the news of the attacks on the Dagu Forts. The Seymour Expedition had been bad enough, moving thousands of soldiers through Chinese territory without permission or even advance notice, but the hostile takeover of the Chinese military installations on the coast was an act of war, no ifs ands or buts. So in fine Cixi tradition, the anti-Boxer advisors were executed, and the Empress Dowager was all in with the Boxers. When it was pointed out to her that the Boxers' claimed ability to repel bullets was probably nonsense, she famously replied:

"Perhaps their magic is not to be relied upon, but can we not rely on the hearts and minds of the people? Today, China is extremely weak. We have only the people's hearts and minds to depend upon. If we cast them aside and lose the people's hearts, what then can we use to sustain the country?"

On June 19, the Chinese government sent a message to each of the eleven foreign embassies in the Legation Quarter, ordering all foreigners to leave Beijing within 24 hours, and darkly warning that if they did not, the Chinese government could not guarantee their safety. The diplomats met, and all agreed that the violence in the countryside between Beijing and the coast made leaving the city unthinkable. The following day, June 20, the German Ambassador Baron von Ketteler, went to the Chinese Foreign Ministry to formally protest the order. But his reputation as a killer of adolescent Chinese boys had preceded him, and he was captured by Chinese soldiers, who killed him.

The embassies in the Legation Quarter called on all foreigners in the city to come into the Legation Quarter. They did, as did close to 3,000 Chinese Christians, including those holed up at the Methodist mission. Frank Gamewell was put in charge of fortifications, and he and the Fighting Parsons set to work. Women missionaries collected fabric and sewing machines and made sandbags, the Chinese Christians were put to work filling them and building barricades. There were also some 3,000 Chinese Catholics hiding in the Roman Catholic cathedral in Beijing, along with a handful of priests, nuns, and detachments of French and Italian soldiers.

The eight principal foreign nations (Britain, America, Russia, Japan, Germany, Austria, France and Italy) began sending reinforcements to China. You may recall from episode 12 that this was about the same time that Lord Roberts and his force of over 100,000 British and Empire soldiers in South Africa had marched into Pretoria, only to realize that the Boers were not defeated and that all they really controlled was a railroad line. And you may recall from episode 6 that this was about the time that America's war in the Philippines was also switching over to a guerrilla campaign, and the United States had more than half of its total army fighting force in the Philippines.

On June 16, the day that they got news of the attack on Tianjin, the U.S. War Department cabled General Arthur MacArthur in Manila, asking him how soon he could get a regiment to China. MacArthur, who is now at this point the military governor of the Philippines, cabled back a message to Washington that said in effect: "Well, guys, I was hoping not to have to tell you this, but this guerrilla war has us spread pretty thin. I can get a regiment to Tianjin in two days if you really want me to, but it's going to be a serious setback for the campaign here in the Philippines."

On June 18, the War Department told him to send the regiment. That same day, the first American reinforcements, about 100 Marines from Cavite under the command of Major Littleton Waller (about whom you are going to hear more, so remember that name) arrived at Dagou. On June 20, the Marines began advancing up the rail line toward Tianjin. They met up with 400 Russian reinforcements along the way. On the 21st, the Russians and the Americans attempted to enter Tianjin, but were driven back by Chinese regulars from the city. Major Waller reported back that the situation in Tianjin appeared hopeless, and that he believed the Seymour Expedition had been lost.

Um, you remember Admiral Seymour, right? The British admiral in command of a multinational force of over 2,000 soldiers, whom we last saw trapped between Beijing and Tianjin and low on supplies? Last time I described the circumstances of Seymour's expedition, I told you that on their way to Beijing, the expedition had met a unit of Chinese soldiers at Yangcun who had let them pass without incident, but when they turned around to head back to Tianjin, the same unit attacked them. If you were wondering what happened in between to change the attitude of the Chinese regulars, the answer is the attack on the Dagou Forts and the Empress Dowager's decision to cast her lot in with the Boxers.

But more reinforcements were arriving, and by the next day, June 22, the allied forces at the coast had grown to about 2,000. By the end of that day, they had managed to force their way into the foreign concession in Tianjin and relieve the force besieged there. That night, the allied forces were astonished to receive a visitor: Chao Yin-ho, a Chinese servant who had been part of the Seymour Expedition. He had walked and swam eight miles, talking his way through Boxer roadblocks and taking fire from trigger-happy French soldiers, to bring the news that the Seymour Expedition was alive and well.

It seems the Seymour Expedition, after almost two weeks of wandering the Chinese countryside after almost constant attack, had that very morning discovered a Chinese arsenal they had not previously known existed. Better still, the arsenal was only lightly defended, and Seymour's troops were able to take control of it. And best of all, there was food, water and ammunition in the arsenal. Seymour's force was holed up there, and they needed relief. A Russian unit under the command of a Colonel Sherinsky,

supplemented by British, German and American troops, fought their way to the arsenal, met up with Seymour on June 25, and escorted his force back to Tianjin. In the end, the Seymour Expedition lost 62 soldiers and brought home 228 wounded.

As June passed into July, the Chinese began to attack the Legation Quarter. The foreigners inside had heard about the attacks on the Dagou Forts, but had no news more recent, and no word on when, or if, help would come. The Italian, Austrian and Dutch embassies were abandoned as being too exposed, and the Christians and foreigners in the Legation Quarter withdrew into an area roughly shaped like a triangle. At the top of the triangle was the British embassy, the largest in the Legation Quarter and the one where the Fighting Parsons concentrated their barricade-building. The bottom of the triangle was the Tartar Wall, an old city wall that loomed above the Legation Quarter. At the two bottom corners of the triangle were the American and German embassies. The foreigners perceived early on that it was crucial that they retain control of the Tartar Wall, because if the Chinese got sharpshooters up there, they would have a commanding view of the entire Legation Quarter. Because of the locations of their embassies, German troops and American Marines got the job of defending the wall.

Chinese attacks on the Legation Quarter were slow and sporadic, because not all Chinese in the military were enthusiastic about attacking the diplomats. They tried setting fires. They tried building barricades and slowly pushing them forward. They tried tunneling under the French embassy and setting off explosives. But the biggest threat came on the first day of July, when a surprise attack on the Tartar Wall succeeded in driving back the Germans and occupying part of the wall. The Americans now faced a hostile force adjacent to them on the top of the wall. The Chinese spent the next couple of days building barricades as a prelude to an assault on the American position. Early in the morning of July 3, the Marines, assisted by British and Russian reinforcements, surprised the Chinese in return, and retook the wall.

The next two weeks saw a series of inconclusive Chinese attacks that were stopped with casualties on both sides. In truth, the Chinese had enough artillery to level the Legation Quarter, but it was never used because, again, not everyone in the Chinese military thought that massacring diplomats was necessarily in the best interest of China. This did not stop *The New York Times* from reporting, incorrectly, that all the foreigners had been killed and their heads paraded through the streets of Beijing. The source of that report appears to be anti-Boxer officials in the Chinese government.

On July 17, a ceasefire was declared in Beijing, and negotiations started up again. The Chinese government again offered to escort the foreigners out of China safely if they would agree to leave. But the fact that Boxers had taken shots at the government messenger who delivered the offer didn't exactly inspire confidence. Still, the ceasefire held, more or less, and enterprising Chinese street vendors even began coming into the Legation Quarter to sell food.

On July 20, friendly Chinese helped the American ambassador get a message back to Washington, explaining that the Legation Quarter was under siege, and would be massacred unless a relief force arrived soon. The U.S. government shared this news with other governments, though some of them wondered if it was a Chinese trick — if the foreigners were already dead, and this was a ruse to trick the relief force into an ambush. But the next day, a message arrived from the British ambassador confirming

the situation in the Legation Quarter. A cheeky British soldier had suggested the message be: “Not massacred yet!” On July 28, the diplomats got their first message back from the outside world, which told them that a relief force was forming in Tianjin, but they should expect another month or more before it arrived.

I’m going to take a break here from the war narrative to go to Germany, where our friend Kaiser Wilhelm II is seeing off a group of German troops on their way to China. A part of his speech to them went as follows:

“A great task awaits you: you are to revenge the grievous injustice that has been done. The Chinese have overturned the law of nations; they have mocked the sacredness of the envoy, the duties of hospitality in a way unheard of in world history. It is all the more outrageous that this crime has been committed by a nation that takes pride in its ancient culture. Show the old Prussian virtue. Present yourselves as Christians in the cheerful endurance of suffering. May honor and glory follow your banners and arms. Give the whole world an example of manliness and discipline.

Should you encounter the enemy, he will be defeated! No quarter will be given! Prisoners will not be taken! Whoever falls into your hands is forfeited. Just as a thousand years ago the Huns under their King Attila made a name for themselves, one that even today makes them seem mighty in history and legend, may the name German be affirmed by you in such a way in China that no Chinese will ever again dare to look cross-eyed at a German.”

The speech was so embarrassing that even the German Foreign Ministry toned down the language in their official printed version. This speech is the basis for the British referring to German soldiers as “Huns” during the Great War.

And, for giving his enemies such a handy piece of propaganda to use against them 15 years later, I would like to award this week’s Kaiser Wilhelm II Award for Making an Ass Out Of Yourself to... Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Anyway, any relief force sent to rescue the diplomats in Beijing would have to deal with the situation in Tianjin. And what was the situation in Tianjin? Well, by the beginning of July, there were close to 10,000 allied soldiers in the Tianjin concession. The Boxers had infiltrated the old walled city of Tianjin, and allied forces were hoping to root them out and secure the rest of the city. A plan was devised to attack the city on July 4, but it had to be called off because the day before, 10,000 Chinese regulars entered the old city and reinforced the Boxer positions. So more time was needed to gather more reinforcements and make additional preparations.

The assault on the walled city finally began in earnest on July 13. The first day’s attacks accomplished little. Because of rivalries between the Japanese and the Russians, who were the two largest forces in the coalition, it was decided that the Russians, along with the Germans, would circle behind the walled city, while the Japanese, and the British and the Americans, would launch the frontal attack.

Once again, frontal assaults against an entrenched enemy proved a poor tactic. The Chinese holed up inside the city were armed with modern long-range rifles with smokeless powder, while the allies were attacking across open muddy ground with minimal cover. As at the Battle of Magersfontein seven months earlier, 19th century virtues of training, courage and discipline proved insufficient to overcome 20th century firearms. As at Magersfontein, the result was that most of the force spent the day lying on their stomachs, in the mud this time, hoping not to be shot. The U.S. Marines in particular, with their distinctive blue uniforms, made good targets.

The following morning, the allies tried again. At 3 A.M., a group of Japanese engineers rushed to the South Gate under heavy Chinese fire. Enough of them survived to plant an explosive charge at the gate, and then they rushed back to the allied position, stringing detonation wire as they went. Unfortunately for these plucky engineers, a lucky Chinese bullet cut the wire, and they were unable to blow the charge. At that point, a Lieutenant Inawe grabbed the fuse and some matches, rushed back to the gate, and detonated the charge by hand, destroying the gate at the cost of his own life.

The Japanese commander, General Yasumasa Fukushima, who previously fought during the Sino-Japanese War, counseled the allies to give the Chinese an escape route. If the Chinese were surrounded, he said, they would fight to the death; but they would evacuate the city if given an opportunity.

The allies did as he suggested, and he was right. When the allied soldiers rushed the city through the South Gate, the Chinese evacuated through the North Gate. The angry and frustrated allied soldiers, deprived of the opportunity to avenge themselves on Chinese soldiers, went after the Chinese civilians in Tianjin. For two days, the city was subjected to killings, rapes, and widespread looting. It is said that the Germans and the Russians were the most violent, the Japanese the least so. A Japanese soldier reportedly asked an American journalist whether the law of war had been revised and no one thought to inform the Japanese. The journalist had no answer, and in fact, most foreign journalists had little or nothing to say about the violence against civilians. The allied armies mostly pointed the finger at each other, and some, implausibly, blamed it all on the Chinese soldiers.

The allies lost about 750 killed and wounded. No one can say what the Chinese losses were. It had taken four weeks from the seizure of the forts at Dagu to the capture of Tianjin. More time would be needed to secure the city, and the allies were still 100 miles away from Beijing. Discouraged allied commanders reported to their governments that they estimated a force of 80,000 would be required to relieve the Legation Quarter.

But reinforcements were coming in all the while, and by the beginning of August, the allied commanders began meeting to plan the advance to Beijing. At this point, the force had grown to about 20,000 — not nearly the 80,000 they had been hoping for, but concerns grew, particularly among the British and Americans, that if they did not act soon, there would be no one left in Beijing to rescue. The French and the Russians, on the other hand, objected that the August heat would make the maneuver difficult, and advised the allies to wait until fall. There were suspicions among the allies that some wanted the delay so that reinforcements from their own country would arrive, and then would be in a stronger position vis-a-vis the other allies during the assault on Beijing.

In the end, the British and Americans announced that they were leaving for Beijing with or without the allies. As it turned out, no one wanted to be left behind, so that settled the matter. The force consisted of about 8,000 Japanese, 5,000 Russians, 3,000 British, 2,000 Americans, and about 1,000 from the other countries. The Japanese and the Russians were geographically the closest, of course, which accounts for their large contributions.

The weather was indeed very hot that August, and they faced opposition from the Chinese all along the way. And there were atrocities committed on both sides. But by August 12, the allied forces were at the gates of Beijing. On the 13th, they began reconnaissance of the walls. By this point, allied cooperation was breaking down. Everyone wanted to be first with the most, first in Beijing with as many soldiers as possible.

It was decided to assign individual city gates to individual forces to attack simultaneously on the 14th. The Americans got the gate closest to the Legation Quarter, which might have given them the best chance, except that Russian reconnaissance showed them that the American gate was lightly defended, so they jumped the gun and attacked the American gate in the middle of the night. Unfortunately for them, they got through the gate only to be pinned down by Chinese sharpshooters. And so when the American forces arrived in the morning, and discovered the hapless Russians, they pondered what to do next. An American officer asked for a volunteer to climb the city wall. A soldier named Calvin Titus volunteered. He climbed the wall unarmed, and discovered the top of the wall was deserted. He raised an American flag and signaled. Soldiers began scrambling up the wall. Calvin Titus would later be awarded a Medal of Honor.

The Japanese had the most difficult time, because although they had the most soldiers, they lacked heavy artillery. Their engineers tried repeatedly to duplicate the success at Tianjin, and eventually did manage to blow the gate, but not until 9:00 in the evening.

It was the British who won the prize. They had quality artillery, and they used it expertly to blow open their gate and drive away the Chinese defenders. They moved quickly through the streets of Beijing, and reached the Legation Quarter, where the foreigners there, dressed in their Sunday best, greeted them with cheers.

The Legation Quarter had been relatively quiet since the ceasefire had been declared, except for the final day, August 13, when the Quarter took some small arms and artillery fire. 55 out of the 409 soldiers defending the Legation Quarter had been killed, as were 13 western civilians. Again, the number of Chinese casualties, and the number of Chinese Christian casualties, can only be guessed at.

Life in the Legation Quarter had been difficult for the western civilians, but not unbearable. They never ran out of food, although toward the end they were down to eating horse meat and dirty rice. Sad to say, the foreigners in the legation quarter did not regard feeding the Chinese Christians as part of their responsibility. The Chinese subsisted on the parts of the horses that the westerners didn't want, as well as stray dogs and birds, tree bark, and whatever else they could get their hands on.

The various embassies had large stocks of liquor, so there was always getting drunk. There were reportedly civilians who spent most of the siege in that condition. The American Marines are widely credited as the best soldiers in the Legation Quarter, but they were also criticized for heavy drinking and foul language. Of course, this was a long time ago, the Marine Corps is very different nowadays.

Following the relief of the Legation Quarter, the allied forces fanned out across the city, ostensibly to secure it, but also to engage in massive murder, rape, and pillage. Foreign civilians joined in, even missionaries and diplomats. One American diplomat reportedly collected a railroad car's worth of loot. The allied troops did relieve the Catholic cathedral.

On August 15, the Empress Dowager and the Emperor fled the city, disguised as peasants, escorted by the Gansu Braves. The Guangxu Emperor did not want to leave. He wanted to stay behind and negotiate with the foreigners. But the last thing the Empress Dowager wanted was foreigners cutting a deal with the Emperor, so she forced him to come along. One story, which may or may not be true, claims that the Emperor's favorite concubine intervened personally with the Empress Dowager to beg that the Emperor be permitted to remain in the city. In classic Cixi fashion, the Empress Dowager reportedly ordered the young lady thrown down a well.

The Empress Dowager and the court were in exile for over a year, until September 1901, when China and the alliance signed the agreement known as the Boxer Protocol. In the meantime, foreign troops ransacked Beijing and northeastern China, looting the countryside and killing anyone they thought might have been a Boxer. The Boxer Protocol required the execution of 10 government officials who had supported the Boxers, and required China to pay reparations of 450 million taels over the next 40 years. That would be 1 tael for each citizen of the citizen of the Chinese Empire. A tael is a Chinese unit of silver, and is worth something like \$25 in our money. With interest, China paid out a total of something like 20 billion dollars.

The death totals for the Boxer Uprising look something like this: About 200 western missionaries, including wives and children, and about 2,500 western soldiers. On the Chinese side, no one can say with certainty, but the numbers are surely appalling. About 2,000 Chinese soldiers, 20,000 to 30,000 Chinese Christians, thousands of civilians killed by western soldiers, tens of thousands of civilians killed by Boxers, and god only knows how many Boxers. The total number of Chinese deaths is surely well over 100,000.

[music: "Liuyang River"]

The Boxer Uprising marks a change in western attitudes toward China. There would be no more land grabs, no more concessions. The Qing dynasty managed to survive the upheaval, and even the Empress Dowager was now convinced of the need for reforms. China would take its first halting steps toward becoming a constitutional monarchy over the next eight years, and the Chinese would send observers to western countries to study the western forms of education, law and policy, as the Japanese had done earlier.

The Empress Dowager passed away in November 1908, just shy of her 73rd birthday. The Guangxu Emperor died the day before she did, at the age of 37. It has been suspected ever since that he was

poisoned to prevent his regaining power. On her deathbed, the Empress Dowager selected his successor: The Xuantong Emperor, who was two years old at the time. You may know of him as “the Last Emperor.”

The Boxer Uprising was important for Japan. The west was perhaps not yet ready to accept Japan as a world power after the Sino-Japanese War back in 1895. But here the Japanese had fought shoulder-to-shoulder with the best armies in the world, and acquitted themselves with honor. Indeed, with the British tied down in South Africa, they had asked the Japanese to supply as many troops as they could, because the British were concerned that the Russians, the country they regarded as their most formidable rival at the time, would be able to send so many soldiers that they would gain too much influence in China.

The Russians were building the Trans-Siberian Railroad during this time, and one of the concessions they had gotten from China was for a rail line across Manchuria to Vladivostok, with a branch line down to Port Arthur. Boxers and bandits began raiding these lines during the Boxer Uprising, and so the Russians deployed 100,000 soldiers into Manchuria to secure them. The Russian government promised to remove them within two years, but the promise will not be kept. This will have consequences for Russia’s relationship with Japan.

The Boer War had convinced the British that their previous policy of isolation and avoiding alliances was no longer practical. The British had sounded out the Germans, who had been proposing alliances just a few years earlier, but the German attitude had changed. In particular, the Germans insisted that the British would have to join the Triple Alliance. The British had wanted a bilateral alliance with Germany. They didn’t mind doing a deal with Italy so much (the Mediterranean was an important region for the British and they were getting along pretty well with the Italians by this time), but allying with Austria was a dealbreaker. Britain had no interest in getting mixed up in the squabbles between Austria and Russia in the Balkans.

And so, in 1902, Britain entered into its first formal alliance with a foreign power, and that power was Japan. It seems surprising at first, but an Anglo-Japanese alliance makes all kinds of sense. British naval priorities are: number one, the British Isles; number two, the Mediterranean; number three, India. The Far East comes a distant fourth. But Britain has important interests there. The Japanese are right there on the scene, and they’re a valuable counterweight against the Russians.

The Boxer Uprising was a watershed moment in U.S. history. William McKinley became the first U.S. president to send American soldiers into combat in a foreign country without a declaration of war or other authorization from Congress. He would not be the last.

The deaths of so many missionaries came as a shock to westerners, who had assumed that their missionaries were saintly and beloved. An awareness began to grow that missionaries might actually be an impediment to peaceful international relations. Over the next decades, many missionary organizations would rethink their approach, and would begin to emphasize the provision of food, healthcare and education to the needy over racking up converts.

Also on the subject of missionaries, on December 24, 1900, the *New York Sun* reported:

The Rev. Mr. Ament, of the American Board of Foreign Missions, has returned from a trip which he made for the purpose of collecting indemnities for damages done by Boxers. Everywhere he went he compelled the Chinese to pay. He says that all his native Christians are now provided for. He had 700 of them under his charge, and 300 were killed. He has collected 300 taels for each of these murders, and has compelled full payment for all the property belonging to Christians that was destroyed. He also assessed fines amounting to thirteen times the amount of the indemnity. This money will be used for the propagation of the Gospel.

Mr. Ament declares that the compensation he has collected is moderate, when compared with the amount secured by the Catholics, who demand, in addition to money, head for head. They collect 500 taels for each murder of a Catholic. In the Wenchiu country, 680 Catholics were killed, and for this the European Catholics here demand 750,000 strings of cash and 680 heads.

The American writer Mark Twain, who you may recall was an outspoken opponent of American imperialism in the Philippines, commented caustically on the *Sun* piece:

By happy luck we get all these glad tidings on Christmas Eve—just the time to enable us to celebrate the day with proper gaiety and enthusiasm. Our spirits soar and we find we can even make jokes; taels I win, heads you lose...

Mr. Ament's financial feat of squeezing a thirteen-fold indemnity out of the pauper peasants to square other people's offenses, thus condemning them and their women and innocent little children to inevitable starvation and lingering death, in order that the blood-money so acquired might be "used for the propagation of the Gospel" ... concrete a blasphemy so hideous and so colossal that, without doubt, its mate is not findable in the history of this or of any other age... Sometimes an ordained minister sets out to be blasphemous. When this happens, the layman is out of the running; he stands no chance.

We'll have to stop there for today, but I hope you'll join me next week for *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we return to the United States. Now that the war in the Philippines is wound down, what's next for America? And whose toes is Theodore Roosevelt stepping on this time? That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. In 2008, on the 100th anniversary of the death of the Guangxu Emperor, the Emperor's remains were exhumed and tested. High levels of arsenic were found, pretty much clinching that he had been poisoned, probably by Yuan Shikai, a Chinese general and governor of Shandong Province during the Boxer Uprising. Back in the days of the Hundred Days' Reform, Yuan had betrayed the Emperor and assisted Cixi and her palace coup. The Emperor never forgave him for that, and it was well known that the Emperor planned to have Yuan executed when he was restored to power. The Emperor left instructions in his will that in the event that he died first, Yuan should be put to death. These instructions were never followed.

[music: Closing Theme]

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