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## THE ALLIES ENTER BEIJING

(14, 15 AUGUST 1900)

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### I

On the night of 14 August 1900, the small international army that had come from Tien-Tsin to the aid of the legations besieged in Peking had penetrated the Chinese capital. The main objective set by the Allies had thus been achieved, thanks to a vigorous offensive and persevering efforts. It may be added, without detracting from the importance of the result achieved, that it had been singularly facilitated by the state of disorganisation in which the Chinese army found itself, which, disoriented, without a command, or at least without direction, without a general defence plan, and totally lacking in initiative, Instead of harassing the allied troops as they marched, fighting them on the outskirts of the capital - in other words, applying the most elementary rules of tactics and showing some virility - it had simply waited for the enemy to strike behind high walls. What's more, the defenders had not taken the precaution of stockpiling, in front of the points most exposed to attack, mines, fougasses and other accessory defences which the Chinese usually excel at using, nor of reinforcing, on the inside, the most threatened gates with planks, bags of earth, etc., in order to put them in a position to withstand the explosion of a charge of dynamite.

Finally, they had not even bothered to guard properly the few gates that could give access to the interior of the square. However, the mere presence in the city of this group of besieged people, however few in number, occupying a point on the monumental rampart which divides Peking into two immense cities, a breach of sorts, through which it could give a hand to the attackers, was, for the Chinese, a very great cause of weakness, a real danger which should have encouraged them even more to try their luck with weapons, outside the possible area of action of this small group, by reserving the supreme effort for the defence of the square itself.

This was far from being the case, and the Chinese army in charge of defending Peking, about thirty thousand strong, made up mainly of Manchus, Muslim soldiers from the Tong-Fuh-Sian corps and Boxers, and only a few units from the Tien-Tsin and Peitzang troops, most of whom were reforming at various points in Pechi-li, awaiting the order from their Government to resume the fight, seems to have had as its main concern to concentrate all its resources on trying to prevent the Allies from entering the Imperial City and the Imperial Palace, and to protect the escape of the Court, operations the success of which would, no doubt, safeguard, in its eyes, the greatest dynastic and national interests at stake.

To sum up, it should be remembered that negotiations had been going on for about twenty days with the Great Powers by Li-Hung-Chang, certainly with the full approval of the Court, - with which this high mandarin had remained in constant communication, via Shang-Hai, - with a view to obtaining that the allied army did not go beyond Tong-Tchéou. From this locality, an international detachment was to go under the walls of Peking, or even into the interior of the capital, to collect the ministers, the staff of the legations and, in general, the Europeans and escort them to Tien-Tsin. These proposals were examined with some benevolence by certain Powers<sup>[1]</sup>, some of these even willingly accepted the principle of a suspension of arms to facilitate their execution. In any case, in the replies which were made to these proposals, all the Powers expressly demanded that, in order to be authorised to continue the negotiations which it had just begun, the Government of the Middle Kingdom should first give, as a matter of urgency, orders to the Chinese authorities and troops to "immediately cease hostilities against foreigners; - to place themselves in friendly communications with the international forces; - to yield to these forces in their march on Peking".

It is easy to imagine that the orders and counter-orders which were probably the consequence, on the part of the Court of China, of these forceful injunctions from the Powers must have had their counter-effect in the drawing up and even more so in the execution of the plans of the Chinese generals, particularly in the arrangements made by the commanders of the troops responsible for opposing the Allied march from Tien-Tsin to Peking and for ensuring the defence of the Chinese capital; they must also have had a disastrous influence on the morale of these troops. The lack of haste with which the Court itself fled Peking, where it was almost captured by the Allies, seems to be striking proof of its confidence in a successful outcome to the negotiations it had just begun<sup>[2]</sup>.

We believe that from a military point of view, as well as from a more general point of view, which will make it possible to identify the feelings that guided his actions in the past.

It will not be without interest to attempt to reconstruct, by means of documents known up to now and also by means of personal information, the main incidents of this historic day of the capture of Peking, by means of personal information, the main incidents of this historic day of the capture of Peking, the news of which had such a great impact throughout the world, where it was universally welcomed with transports of joy, as a new triumph of civilisation over barbarism.

In order not to be drawn into departing from the correctness which should govern the relations of soldiers who fought side by side, - by formulating appreciations which could appear disparaging, and which one would not fail to attribute to a disappointment, originating in the role, too effete for one's liking, played on that day, by the French corps, which claimed the right to take a more active part in the operations which were being prepared, - it is advisable not to dwell too long on the motives which may have led the commanders of certain contingents to contravene, in such a flagrant manner, and not, in all probability, without some premeditation, the agreements reached on 12th August at Tong-Tchéou, in the Council of Generals, concerning the arrangements that were to be agreed on the evening of the 14th, with a view to the general attack on Peking by all the allied corps, following their concentration, which was to take place, during the course of the 14th, beneath the walls of the Chinese capital. The possibility of one of the contingents, as a result of an unforeseen circumstance, bringing forward, even by just one hour, the moment of the deliverance of the Legations, without feeling obliged to scrupulously respect the common line of conduct that had been drawn up, was certainly of such a nature as to legitimise any action that might be taken, This was despite the fact, as we knew from the information which had just reached the allied corps at Tong-Tchéou on 12 August from emissaries of the legations, that the besieged were in a position to continue their resistance at least until 20 August.

The unacknowledged desire of one of the leaders to achieve this result with his own resources alone, without the knowledge of the others, either by using secret information or by rushing events, and solely with the intention of claiming all the honour for his country, was less easy to justify: all the allied contingents having, in fact, contributed, to the extent of their means, and thanks to an understanding, up to this day as complete as could be hoped for, to the realisation of the common work, - a work which could, in fact, only be accomplished as a result of this happy cooperation, - all, in the same way, were entitled to share in this honour. Finally, as the reconnaissance operations of 12 and 13 August had shown that the approaches to Peking were not defended, it was in the Allies' interest, from every point of view, before rushing, as it were, into the Chinese capital, at least to agree on a rational plan for its occupation. In order to present an overview of this military drama, the phases of which are like so many partial actions which took place at points several kilometres apart, as close as possible to reality, - despite the disadvantage of some repetition and at the risk of accentuating even more the disjointedness of these operations - we will give the floor successively to one of the actors or witnesses of this drama, in order to relate the part played by each contingent. However, we feel it is our duty to point out at this point the incoherence that governed the general arrangements that led to the fall of the ramparts of the Chinese capital; the absence, here as elsewhere, of a superior direction, the lack of

We see two contingents who had neglected to light each other's flanks firing at each other at close range for ten minutes before recognising their mistake; one leader not hesitating to refuse his help, others to regain their independence at the very moment when solidarity was most needed, etc. Fortunately, we were in China, and a *Chinoiserie*, as has often been said, during this campaign, in similar circumstances, one more *Chinoiserie* would not, this time again, lead to any trouble. Fortunately, we were in China, and a *Chinese mistake*, as has often been said in the course of this campaign, in similar circumstances, one more Chinese mistake should not, this time again, have led to unfortunate consequences for those who had committed it!

In the following pages, extracted from a more extensive account <sup>[3]</sup>, we shall confine ourselves to describing in particular the role played by the French corps on that day, after first giving a brief summary of the operations of each of the allied contingents.

*Japanese.* - The Japanese, who had pushed their outposts to the bridge at Pa-li-kao from the 12th, requested, at a conference of generals ordered, then countermanded, then resumed on the evening of 12th August, to march on the capital by the main paved road, in other words in the direction of the eastern gates of the Tartar City: Tchi-Houa-Men and Toung-Tche-Men. The motive that guided the soldiers of the Levant Sun's dregs should not be attributed solely, as has been written, to the desire they had to reserve for themselves the most difficult and therefore the most glorious task in this attack, but also, as a glance at the plan of Peking shows, to the advantages they would gain by taking one of these gates, by giving them immediate and direct access to the richest districts of the Tartar City, and by leading them quickly to the gates of the Imperial Palace.

On the afternoon of the 13th, the Japanese left Tong-Tcheou and bivouacked halfway to Peking, pushing their outposts as far as the suburb before the Chi-Houa gate. On the 14th, when they heard the news that the Russians had attacked Toung-Pien-Men, they tried to take Chi-Houa-Men at around nine in the morning. But it was not until the evening, around eight o'clock, when the defenders of this gate had already learned of the arrival of the allied detachments at the Legations, in other words on their very line of retreat, that they managed to blow up this gate and penetrate the Tartar City. In the meantime, two Japanese battalions had been directed, at about five o'clock in the evening, by a side road, from Tchi-Houa-Men to Toung-Pien-Men; they entered the Chinese City, then the Legations, following General Linéwitch's battalions, at about seven-thirty in the evening. Two other Japanese battalions, marching along the top of the ramparts, arrived there around two o'clock in the morning.

*Russians.* - On 13 August, General Linewitch was informed of the following two points by a reconnaissance carried out the day before by his chief of staff: the roads to Peking were free; and the Chinese, according to reports from the inhabitants of the villages he had passed through, had concentrated all their resources on defending the Tartar city.

Informed that the Japanese intended to attack Peking with their forces alone, before the day that had been set by mutual agreement by the allies, General Linéwitch instructed General Wassilewsky, on the 13th, at two o'clock in the evening, to lead a strong offensive reconnaissance towards Toung-Pien-Men, with the mission of trying to capture this gate, if circumstances allowed. At two o'clock in the morning, General Wassilewsky was in control of this gate. The rest of the

he Russian contingent, which had set out in the evening and bivouacked during the night on the north bank of the Imperial Canal, level with the American corps, presented itself in front of Toug-Pien-Men at around eight o'clock in the morning; only at midday did two Russian battalions, under the orders of General Linewitch, penetrate the Chinese City: in the evening, at around seven o'clock, they arrived at the Legations.

*Americans.* - The American contingent had left Tong-Tchéou in the afternoon of 13 August, taking the road along the south bank of the Imperial Canal, and had come to bivouac at the second barrage. A cavalry reconnaissance the same day in the direction of Toug-Pien-Men revealed that the road to Peking was not defended. On the morning of the 14th, the American contingent had lost contact with the main Russian corps, which had spent the night on the other bank of the canal, at its level. Together with the French corps, with which it had been in contact since about five o'clock in the morning of the same day, the American contingent occupied the village near the first dam, about 2,500 metres from Toug-Pien-Men, at about nine o'clock in the morning. Driven by the troops he had sent forward from this point to reconnoitre the villages on his front and left flank, the American general gradually pushed forward to Toug-Pien-Men with all his forces, forgetting to inform the French corps, with which he had in fact been co-operating since the morning, of the changes he was making to the arrangements that had just been agreed between the chiefs of these two contingents. He entered the Chinese City through this gate a little after the first Russian troops under General Linewitch. A large part of the American contingent, taking the lead over these troops, arrived at around five o'clock in the evening on the Legation grounds.

*The British.* - The British contingent, which had remained in the bivouac at Tong-Tchéou on the evening of the 13th, set off during the night in the direction of Tcha-Houo-Men, the "South-East Gate" of the Chinese City, along a path running about a kilometre parallel to the Imperial Canal. At about noon, he arrived at this gate, which had been reported by the Japanese colonel Shiba to the British minister in Peking, and by the latter to General-in-Chief Gaselee, as being undefended, and where he did not encounter any resistance. The whole of the British contingent entered the Chinese City; part of it went to occupy the Temple of Heaven as a point of support on the left and future billeting place for this contingent; the rest, with General-in-Chief Gaselee, headed for the sewer gate which had also been indicated by the British Minister in Peking - by means of the Chinese emissaries dispatched during the siege - as providing him with easy access to the Legation grounds. At half past three, the general entered the field and joined up with the defenders of the Legations.

## II

*The special role of the French expeditionary corps.* - On 12 August, at six o'clock in the morning, the small French corps, faithful to the rendezvous, had established itself in a large halt at the entrance to the small suburb which precedes Tong-Tchéou to the south, ready to cooperate in the attack on this place in the event of the enemy attempting any resistance. However, during the night, the six hundred Chinese soldiers assigned to defend the town - perhaps in order to avoid the consequences of taking it by force, and, in all probability, in compliance with the Court's orders - had withdrawn through the North Gate, while the Japanese presented themselves at the opposite gate. This gate was simply barricaded with sacks filled with earth; the use of a few

cartridges of dynamite was enough to create a passage. According to the forecasts in the cablegram sent by General Frey to the French Government on 9 August, the Allies had thus arrived 25 kilometres from Peking, without any fighting, after those at Peitzang and Yang-Tsoun, other than insignificant engagements at Ho-Si-Wou and Chang-Chia-Wan, between Chinese parties and Russian and Japanese cavalry, supported by the Japanese vanguard.

Tong-Tchéou, on the right bank of a tributary of the Peï-Ho, is a very important military and commercial town, thanks to its position as the terminus of river navigation.

From time immemorial, it was the warehouse for all products heading for the Chinese capital from the south or east, and which did not take the direct route by land from Tien-Tsin to Peking, which was converted into a railway only a few years ago. From Tong-Tsin, these products were transported either via the Imperial Canal, with its five reaches, which passes through Tong-Pien-Men (Tong-Pien Gate), where the walls of the Tartar City and the Chinese City of Peking are joined on their eastern sides; or via the wide paved road which, from the northern suburb, leads to the Tchi-Houa, or Tchi-Koua, or Tchao-Yang Gate.

The town of Tong-Tchéou, like most of the large indigenous cities, is enclosed within a polygon of walls, broken in the shape of pincers, and about 5,000 metres long: one of the large faces runs parallel to the river and a few hundred metres from the bank. These walls, whose blackish tinge attests to their antiquity, are ten to twelve metres high, thick, solid, topped with keeps and pierced with embrasures and loopholes, and are not only capable of protecting the town from surprise, but also of providing an honourable defence in the hands of determined men.

While the staff officers carried out a detailed reconnaissance of the cantonment, General Frey entered Tong-Tchéou. The Japanese were already occupying the main streets; it seemed as if their arrival was expected, for as soon as their presence was announced, the shop fronts were almost immediately adorned with small flags consisting of a square of white calico with a red circle in the middle, the emblem of the "Rising Sun". On the friendly advice of Japanese General Fukushima, who knows this region like the back of his hand and who, with General Yamaguchi, has set up his headquarters in a comfortable

"General Frey chose the faubourg Nord, known for its cleanliness and freshness, as his billet. The cantonment order was given and serious safety measures were taken. A bridge a few hundred metres upstream, over the river, over which a few hours earlier the 600 regulars from Tong-Tchéou had gone to join a Chinese corps five leagues to the north, was occupied by a section of infantry; the commander of the staging post was appointed, and the defence arrangements, in anticipation of an offensive return that might be attempted by the enemy after the departure of the column, were decided.

As much for reasons of humanity as for reasons of interest, - with a view to providing himself, for the supply period which is about to begin, with resources in livestock and foodstuffs, as well as the recruitment of the many coolies who will soon be needed for the various transports, - General Frey is renewing to the troops the prescriptions of the orders which he issued, on his arrival in Paris.

Tien-Tsin, concerning the prohibition of all acts of pillage and all ill-treatment of the inhabitants as well as of enemy prisoners and wounded. He added that no requisitions should be made by anyone other than the officers designated for this purpose, who would immediately pay the value in cash or in regular vouchers. He informed the few notables he had been able to summon of these provisions and they hastened to bring some supplies to headquarters, in particular a large stock of rice and wheat, the value of which was scrupulously paid to the owners. At the same time, safeguards were provided for the most important buildings, and small tricoloured flags were distributed to shopkeepers to enable them to claim French protection. Sentries or plantons were placed at the crossroads of the busiest streets, with orders to ensure the safety of the inhabitants, to watch over their freedom of movement, and so on. The inhabitants gradually regained confidence: some of those who had fled at our approach returned to their homes. However, in the afternoon, a lamentable exodus began through the suburb, which would continue throughout the morning of the following day. Thousands upon thousands of people of all ages and all walks of life, sensing that safety in their homes would become very precarious after the departure of the columns, abandoned Tong-Tchéou and streamed northwards in whole families over the bridge: middle-class people recognisable by the richness of their clothes; old men led by the hand by children, pressing with the other hand against their chest the tablets of the Ancestors which adorned the domestic altar, the dearest treasure of the family, and only moving away with sorrow from the home where their fathers lived and where they aspired to the happiness of ending their days in peace; women with deformed feet, stumbling at every step and dragging themselves with difficulty, and some of whom have covered their faces and hands with ashes as a sign of mourning, with the intention of arousing some pity in the hearts of these strangers and being able, thanks to this feeling, to flee without being bothered; Young girls in brightly coloured clothes, their cheeks red with blush, tufts of flowers still stuck in their hair; all of them surprised, frightened and as if suddenly awakened by a horrible nightmare,

- having been kept completely unaware, until the last moment, according to the custom of the Chinese, in the depths of the gynaeceum where they live confined, of the misfortunes with which they were threatened, just as they are usually kept away from all the noises of public life ; - servants accompanying their masters, laden with huge bundles in which the most precious objects have been hastily piled up; sick people, poor invalids carried away by coolies on Chinese wheelbarrows, the ragged and the destitute; in a word, a whole population of panic-stricken people, from the wealthy class to the scum of a large Chinese city, parading around in the most pitiful disarray.

All these people hurried, jostled and overtook each other, with no regard for the rules of protocol that only a public disaster could make them forget: a few, the boldest, glanced back from time to time as they moved away, towards Tong-Tchéou, which, in their imagination, they already saw delivered to the flames and reduced to ashes.

"Pou haï raï!" shouted the French soldiers as the crowd passed, to whom this expression, often used by their general, had become familiar: "Have no fear! "Pou haï raï!" some of the men repeated with a hoarse exclamation as they stopped, hesitant and undecided, as if to realise that this apostrophe was addressed to them; and immediately afterwards they were reassured,

to start walking again, bowing low, very low, to the soldiers, as if they were very high people, while others felt obliged to smile, but with a smile tinged with inexpressible sadness, and others, especially the women, their chests oppressed, trembling with terror, hastened their steps even more to get away as soon as possible from these "pale faces," these

The "foreign devils" whose armies invaded and upset this peaceful region just forty years ago, and whom traditions, books and popular images have portrayed ever since as "barbarians", ferocious and cruel people capable of all crimes and the worst atrocities!

Alas! this reputation for savagery and cruelty, under which the 'western devils' have been known since that time, will serve for many years to come to designate them to future generations, in this part of Pe-tchi-li where calamities have this time come to strike in greater numbers and even more appallingly than in the past! These times of desolation and abomination, as the days of public mourning are often described in the vivid tales, full of terrifying visions, that the Chinese like to lull their children into, will often be remembered with abhorrence by these unfortunate populations! The town of Tong-Tchéou, which the wise measures of the allied chiefs were able to save from disaster for a while, was soon plundered, ransacked and burnt to the ground, to the extent that today a large part of it is nothing but a heap of ruins and rubble.

Of course, war is and always will be war, the terrible scourge with its trail of devastation, slaughter and massacre, and whatever we say, whatever we do, just as it will be the *ultima ratio* of nations for a long time to come, so defeat will continue to bring with it the inescapable burden of horrors and grief so strikingly typified by the pitiless *Væ victis!* of the Ancients. Rightly, among civilised peoples, voices are being raised unceasingly to condemn, with all the indignation they are capable of, the destruction, the useless violence and the brutal or cruel abuse of force in all its forms. For their part, the leaders whose mission it is to give the soldiers they lead into battle the example of bravery and contempt for death, also know that they have other duties, and that one of their main concerns, in victory, The excitement of a fierce battle or the spectacle, or even the simple account, of some of those atrocities, of which the Orientals are accustomed, committed on Europeans or on comrades who have fallen into their hands, can awaken those bestial or bloodthirsty instincts which lie dormant in the depths of the human soul. In this Chinese campaign, as far as it was able, the command never failed in this duty, and by their attitude, by their moderation, by the repeated orders to respect private property and recommend generosity and clemency towards the defeated, the French officers proved that they were aware of its high moral significance.

And indeed, thanks to these provisions, discipline was always maintained in satisfactory conditions. In certain circumstances, for example in the first few moments after the storming of certain localities, such as Tien-Tsin and certain districts of Peking, some excesses may have been committed by dispersed groups still struggling with the enemy and over whom the authorities temporarily lost their direct influence; some Chinese on the run, mistaken for Boxers, may have been put to the sword; some depredations may have been committed in abandoned houses.



It would be puerile to contradict them: the excitement of combat, the need to quickly put the enemy out of action in order to ensure success, are enough to explain these excesses. The list would be much longer of more reprehensible acts, carried out coldly and systematically, which could be held against the victor in each of these wars between nations that claim to lead civilisation.

Undoubtedly, in this heterogeneous multitude of a hundred thousand soldiers or coolies belonging to eight nationalities which have neither the same feelings nor the same morals, and which the Powers have, so to speak, poured at once into Petchi-li, like an overflowing river, there may have been some who were cowardly and miserable enough to commit against harmless inhabitants or weak beings some of those appalling crimes which would be punishable by prison or the gallows. People who have set themselves the task of trying to destroy the spirit of discipline in the army, and to sow disaffection for the leaders, thus working, knowingly or unknowingly, to prepare for these defeats whose terrible consequences they depict for us in all their atrocity, have taken it upon themselves to collect, to use as a weapon against an institution to which France owes the greatest part of its prestige, its prosperity and its glory, the account of crimes of all kinds attributed to the various expeditionary corps, - for the most part the fanciful flights of fancy of novelists, or the talk of Tartarins in the barracks, which they have taken pleasure in popularising by further amplifying the horror. What they do not add is that similar infamies, if they really occurred, could only have been the work of very rare exceptions and were only perpetrated in the shadows, far from the eyes of officers and other soldiers; that they were not the fault of the French, who, on the contrary, on many occasions, acting without orders, under the spontaneous impulse of the feelings of generosity inherent in our race, chased from their cantonments suspects who were wandering in search of plunder or caught in the act of brutality towards the natives; And finally, no case could be cited in which one of these reprehensible acts was committed with the knowledge or under the eyes of an officer, without his energetic intervention on behalf of those who were the victims, and rigorous repression followed.

The perpetrators of the fires that have consumed entire cities, of the robberies and crimes that have terrorised the population and aroused so much righteous disapproval, must be sought among the Chinese swarming over the great cities: scoundrels, rogues, criminals and vagabonds of every description, bogus beggars, coolies fleeing from work, a breed from all times and all countries, for whom any opportunity is a good one to indulge their passions and give free rein to their rapacious instincts at the expense of foreigners as well as their compatriots. They were the first to rush to form the clientele of these Boxers who, in an explosion of fanaticism, rose up in various parts of China, determined to put an end to the commercial, industrial and political invasion of the Westerners, and to drive them out of the country. Once they had been armed and organised into large bands, they used this feeling of patriotism to stir up unrest among the people, who were for the most part peaceful, docile and resigned, to spread terror and perpetuate a disorder from which they profited greatly. Already, at the end of the exodus of the inhabitants of Tong-Tchéou, sinister types were reported, wretches dressed in rags, walking in small groups, bustling about, coming and going and going away, loaded with booty, in opposite directions.

to the rest of the crowd. As soon as some clues and the careful denunciation of a few natives revealed that they were up to something, they disappeared into the town. They began by robbing abandoned houses; soon, they would set fire to those that were still occupied, in order to drive out the inhabitants and carry out their industry by setting fires, not hesitating to deliver entire districts of the town to the flames. A few days after the departure of the column for Peking, we saw them carrying torches through the streets of Tong-Tcheou every night, and then, when the northern quarter had been completely ransacked, continuing their incendiary exploits in the suburb and even in the vicinity of the post itself, which they tried to set ablaze on several occasions.

These scenes of brigandage and devastation will be repeated in Peking and at all points in Peking-Chi-li where, on the approach of the allied columns, the native authority will be disorganised or in flight and where these elements of disorder will then be able to give free rein to their worst instincts<sup>[4]</sup>.

During the days of 12 and 13 August, the various French units that had set off from Tien-Tsin and Yang-Tsoun on 9 and 10 August finished concentrating at Tong-Tchéou, where on the evening of 13 August General Frey had around 450 rifles and three batteries of artillery. He was counting on the arrival, on the night of 13 August or during the day of the following day, at Tong-Tchéou: 1° a detachment of about 300 men from the reinforcement of 180 men sent from Saigon, and a complement of able-bodied soldiers still recruited from the garrisons of Tien-Tsin and Yang-Tsoun; this would have enabled him to march on Peking with respectable numbers, given the meagre resources at his disposal; 2° a small column, made up of German, Austrian and Italian sailors, which, on the advice of General Frey, had been hastily put together at Tien-Tsin after the departure of the Allies, and was advancing at forced marches with the intention of co-operating in the attack on Peking alongside the French corps.

The small international column had set off from Tien-Tsin on the evening of 9th August, with the firm resolve to make every effort to achieve the desired result. As it passed through Matou, Chang-Chia-Wan and Tong-Tchéou, sensing that the lack of resistance from the Chinese army, which was thus successively evading the Allies, would hasten the fall of the capital, General Frey, - who had himself received a fraternal message from General Linéwitch on the way, General Frey, who had himself received a dispatch rider on the road from General Linewitch, confirming these forecasts, sent advice after advice to Captain Pohl, of the German navy, commanding this column, urging him to speed up his march if he wanted to reach Peking in good time. He also advised him - and at the same time prescribed this to the commanders of the French detachments, who were also expected - to skip the Tong-Tchéou stage, so as to join the French corps without delay at the bivouac beneath the walls of Peking.

General Frey also recommended that the commanders of the French detachments en route, who would not be able to join him on the morning of 15th August at the latest, under the walls of Peking, in order to enter the Chinese capital with him, should henceforth regulate their march in such a way as not to tire the men and thus bring to Peking only fresh troops, immediately available for any operations that might become necessary. In reality, this prescription applied in particular to the battalions that had come from France, because, having received no communication from the rear, he was counting right up to the last moment, before entering Peking, on the arrival of all the detachments that had received their marching orders.

the order to join the head of the column at forced marches, *doubling the stages*, and who, to facilitate these marches, found food and their billeting prepared in the various stage lodgings. However, due to delays - for various reasons - in setting off or leading the detachments that left Tien-Tsin or Yang-Tsoun after his departure, only the troops directly under his command arrived at Peking in good time to take part in the operation <sup>[5]</sup>.

On the evening of the 13th, in anticipation of the arrival of these various detachments, he issued a general order inviting the officers and soldiers to prepare their billets and the

The aim was to provide "soup" for the German, Austrian and Italian officers and soldiers expected in Tong-Tchéou that very night, and to give the foreigners the fraternal welcome that is due to comrades in arms.

Unfortunately, difficulties of all kinds prevented the plan that had been devised at Tien-Tsin from being carried out in full: the poor state of the roads, made worse by the rain from several storms; the lack of training for marching on the part of the sailors who made up almost all the allied detachments, who, at the last moment, had got bogged down with a few food wagons, which had the effect of reducing their mobility still further; the great fatigue of the men; the large number of sick and crippled men, etc. It was only at the cost of a considerable effort and thanks to the great energy displayed by the leaders of the three allied detachments that the little 'Triplíce', as our soldiers had called it, was able to get through. It was only at the cost of a considerable effort and thanks to the great energy displayed by the leaders of the three allied detachments that the little 'Triplíce', as our soldiers had called this column, was able to reach Peking on the morning of 18 August.

### III

On 12 August, the generals in command of the allied contingents received a summons from General Linewitch for a conference to be held at six o'clock in the evening of the same day at Russian headquarters. General Frey, on his way to this meeting, received a new notice asking the generals-in-chief to postpone this conference until the following day, 13 August, at nine o'clock in the morning, as it seemed to the Russian general that the day of the 13th should be devoted to giving rest to the troops exhausted by the fatigue of the previous days. The Japanese, British and American generals, whose camps were close to the Russian camp, met and, after consulting each other, went to see General Linewitch to tell him that their opinion was to continue the march on Peking from the very next day, 13th August. At the same time, the Japanese general announced that he had pushed a strong detachment beyond the Palikao bridge, a third of the way from Tong-Tcheou to Peking.

Finally, it was decided at this conference that the day of the 13th would be used by the allies to carry out reconnaissance in the direction of Peking: the Japanese, by the roads to the north of the paved road; the Russians, by this very road; the Americans, by the road running along the south bank of the Imperial Canal; finally, the British, by a parallel road passing about a kilometre to the south of the latter. During the day of the 14th, the operational corps should move forward and form an assembly formation on both banks of the Imperial Canal, on a front marked by a line drawn about three miles east of the walls of Peking, with the French on a level with and to the left of the Russians. In a conference to be held in the afternoon of the same day, at the Russian bivouac, the

Arrangements will be made for a general attack on the walls of Peking on the night of 14 to 15 August or on the morning of 15 August, and for the occupation of this capital.

On 13 August, at ten o'clock in the morning, General Frey had a long discussion at the Russian headquarters with General Linewitch and his chief of staff, General Wassilewsky, which was made difficult by the absence of the Russian officers who usually acted as interpreters. General Linéwitch informed him that, on the afternoon of the previous day, during the conference of generals, his chief of staff, with a squadron of cavalry, had made a reconnaissance along the path that follows the *south* bank of the Imperial Canal, which had shown that the road to Peking was free. In the course of this reconnaissance, a Chinese-speaking interpreter by the name of Yantchewietyky had even managed to slip in close to the bridge situated a few hundred metres from the Toung-Pien-Men gate, and had reported that this gate was not seriously occupied.

The Russian general informed the French general of the decisions taken the previous day during the conference, and announced that the legations had just informed the Japanese and British generals, through emissaries, that they had ample supplies of meat until 20 August and flour until 30 August. Under these conditions, it seemed that the advance could be delayed by a day, without any inconvenience, to allow the international army to have fresh troops for the attack on Peking. It was agreed between the French and Russian generals that, in the new conference which was to take place the next day, at the bivouac, in front of Peking, with a view to determining the plan of this attack, a motion would be made by these general officers to obtain that the Imperial Palace be respected by the Allies; that the Court, if captured, be the object of the greatest respect ; and finally, that measures be agreed upon, as soon as possible, for the division of the capital into sectors, in order to enable the city to be quickly purged of the Regulars and Boxers who might be there, to re-establish order, and to ensure the safety of the inhabitants who had not abandoned their homes.

General Linéwitch also informed the French general of his intention to propose attacking the walls of Peking by taking the Toung-Pien-Men gate, situated at the junction of the walls of the Tartar City and the Chinese City. For the Russian general, possession of this point seemed to be of considerable tactical importance, in that it would immediately provide easy access to both the interior of the Chinese City and the interior of the Tartar City.

For his part, General Frey explained that he had had a dozen ladders made from very long poles found in large numbers in Tong-Tchéou, which he intended to use to climb the Chinese wall, which is 9 to 10 metres high. From there, at the point where the ramparts were welded together, a similar operation could undoubtedly be used to climb the 16-metre-high Tartar wall.

At General Linéwitch's request, an officer, followed by a section of Russian engineers, immediately went to the French cantonment with the mission of urgently making around twenty ladders of the same model, using poles made available to him, so that he could be equipped with them.

On his return to the camp, the general commanding the French corps gave his orders

to comply with the provisions laid down by the allied leaders. A hundred or so men, taken from among the most tired, were left to defend the Tong-Tchéou post, as the situation of the French cantonment, facing north, required a minimum of this number. A squad was detached at the exit of the southern suburb to guide the expected fractions who were ordered to join the column under the walls of Peking. The troops designated to march included: a battalion commander, Major Feldmann, 15 officers and 330 naval infantry; a squadron commander, Major Faniard, two batteries of 80 mountain guns and one battery of 80 field guns served by 9 officers and 250 artillerymen, including around 100 Annamese auxiliary gunners.

The main strength of the French corps thus lay in these three batteries, which, especially in view of the superior training of the personnel who served them and the power of the 80 field battery, represented an important element of the international army's artillery force.

The column, for the convenience of the march, is split into three groups, following each other at half-hour intervals:

1st group. - Two companies of marine infantry;

2nd group. - Two companies of marine infantry, with the two mountain batteries;

3rd group. - Two companies of marine infantry, with the field battery.

The first group set off at 11.30 in the evening. The darkness of the night and the poor state of the roads, worn by torrential rain during the day and again in the evening, made for a slow and arduous march.

On the 14th, at 1.30 am, the first group crossed the Palikao bridge and set off along the road that ran 100 to 150 metres along the south bank (right bank) of the Canal Impérial. At around half past four in the morning, the column passed a bivouac camp containing several hundred men, lying on either side of the road, near a small cluster of houses forming the hamlet of Kao-Pei-Tien and occupied by other groups. There were no complicated security arrangements: two sentries guarded the exits, and a launch was stationed two hundred metres away, in the direction of Peking; this was the bivouac of the American expeditionary force. An officer from this contingent, asked by General Frey where the Russian corps was, which, according to his information and the agreements reached, should be at this point on the *right* bank of the canal, replied that no international troops had yet passed this point and that he thought the Russians were bivouacked alongside the American contingent on the other bank of the canal.

The column continued marching for a few hundred metres to clear the area around the bivouac. Arriving at a small group of houses that the scouts had just reported as unoccupied, the column was halted and laid out in a preparatory battle formation, straddling the road, the right to the canal. There could no longer be any doubt; a mistake, probably a confusion of words in the naming of the banks - right bank instead of north bank - or an interpreter's error, must have been made about

This information could not be verified by an officer sent the day before by the general to the Japanese headquarters for this purpose, following the unexpected departure of this contingent.

It was important to deal as quickly as possible with the consequences of this error of direction. There were two possible solutions: 1° Retrograde the column and take it back to the north bank via the Palikao bridge. The result would have been a great loss of time and additional fatigue for the troops; 2° have the column cross the canal, by some means, close to the point where it had stopped. The general had no hesitation in choosing this last solution, especially as the general attack by the Allies on the Chinese capital was only planned for the following night, if not even for the morning of the following day, 15 August, so the column had the whole day to make this crossing and reach the Russian bivouac. The large point map of Pechi-li, the only one in the possession of the general staff, despite all the efforts and research made by General Frey in Saigon, and then on his way to Shang-hai and Nagasaki, to obtain documents of this nature, gave no indication of the topography of the region. The general sent M. d'Anthouard and a staff officer to explore the surrounding area and find the location of the nearest canal lock. On being told by M. d'Anthouard and a guide that a lock, or rather a dam, capable of giving passage to a Chinese cart, was located about two kilometres in front of the column and about 2,500 metres from the Toung-Pien-Men gate, the general sent a small section of infantry, under the orders of a staff officer, to reconnoitre this dam and find out if it was occupied by the enemy. In the meantime, an American officer came to tell the General, on behalf of General Chaffee, commander of the corps of this Power, that he must have taken the wrong direction; that no allied troops were in front, and that he was, as a result, in the air, very exposed, given the small size of his column.

In a few words, General Frey informed this officer of his plan and invited him to inform his general. At that moment, around six o'clock in the morning, a platoon of Bengal cavalry, followed by a platoon of American cavalry, overtook the column and moved forward, searching the terrain.

By six fifteen the first two marching groups of the French corps were reunited; the third group, comprising the field artillery, delayed in its march by various difficulties it had encountered, followed at a distance of about 1,500 metres. The general, with sufficient light on his front, slowly set the column back on the road, bringing it closer to the barrage.

The country, flat and even from Tong-Tcheou, changes a little from this point onwards. There are a few undulations, a few folds of land; but the view is still very limited, because of the orchards which multiply as you approach Peking, and the maize, sorghum and other crops which, when fully ripe at this time of year, reach several metres in height. From the tops of the trees, where a few officers climb to look at the horizon, you can see nothing but thickets of inextricable greenery on all sides. In the distance, to the east, a few jagged blue ridges appeared at intervals: these were the Mongolian mountains. The path, broken, often steep, formed by four or five parallel tracks at difficult crossings, runs like a long parade through these hedges of high crops.

The column had gone barely a kilometre when a few isolated shots, followed by two or three salvos, were heard. It was the French section detached for reconnaissance, which, before entering a small village near the barrage, was responding to a dozen rifle shots with which some Boxers had greeted it and the two platoons of allied cavalry. A fraction of this cavalry fell back hastily behind the section and dismounted; another, overtaking the column at a brisk pace, rallied the American camp. The French section immediately took up position at the eastern end of the village. The commanding officer had been formally ordered not to engage fully and, in the event of encountering superior forces, to fall back on the column. A *withdrawal* platoon was immediately sent to him in case of such an eventuality.

The general had the march continued for a few hundred metres to reach a spot that seemed to him to be an excellent waiting position.

Its small infantry strength, barely sufficient to support its artillery, did not allow the small French corps, isolated, on the point, without cavalry to explore the surrounding area, without news of what was happening to its right and left, to take the offensive at this time - which, moreover, would have been absolutely contrary to the agreements reached between the allied leaders, - and thus to commit himself further to premature action, on ground that could be beaten by artillery fire from the capital's walls, and, in any case, in an area within the radius of action of the troops who, virtually, had been charged with blocking the roads leading to the gates of Peking or, at the very least, with defending the approaches to these gates.

It was a small plateau stretching from the road to the canal, over a frontage of two to three hundred metres, with two pagodas preceded by terraces and surrounded by walls as support points. All the coolies in the column, most of whom were volunteers recruited in Tong-Tchéou under the direction of a few soldiers, were immediately employed to cut down the sorghum trees with their "cutters" to create a field of fire in front. At the same time, the troops quickly took up their fighting positions. At this point, a few Bengal lancers, no doubt lost in the skirmish, galloped back through the sorghum and passed within a few hundred metres of the fraction posted on the left wing of the line, which, believing they were dealing with Chinese, prepared to greet them with rifle fire. Thanks to the cool-headedness of the leaders, an unfortunate mistake was avoided in time. Some of the coolies, sensing danger, took advantage of the incident to flee.

Around 7.30 a.m., the General was informed that the few Boxers who were near the roadblock and whose mission was undoubtedly to signal the approach of the Allies by the shots that had been heard, had disappeared; and that the section of scouts was occupying the western end of the village. He immediately sent his orderly, Captain Bobo, back to the American general to inform him of the situation and to let him know, in particular, that the incident that had just taken place had been reduced to an unimportant skirmish and that he was going to occupy the village at the dam.

This officer found General Chaffee at the bivouac, among the troops.

He replied, "Tell your general that the Russians are three kilometres behind us, on the other bank of the canal. Repeat to your general," he replied, "that the Russians are three kilometres behind us, on the other bank of the canal, and that his column is at the moment very high in the air, very exposed. At about eight o'clock, just as the small French column was about to start moving again, General Chaffee, with a large staff and all his cavalry, joined the French column and asked General Frey to overtake it to come to the aid of his cavalry; most of his infantry followed him, at a brisk pace, five or six hundred metres behind. The French general, who had already informed him that the skirmish was over, replied that, due to the disposition of his troops, the road was clear and that he was free to overtake him. During a short halt in the French column near the barrage, a fraction of the American contingent was brought forward. In a rapid exchange of observations and information that he had with General Chaffee on horseback, General Frey thought he sensed that this general officer feared that the French troops would continue their movement in an attempt to enter Peking first; He gave him the formal assurance that he had no intention of seeking to violate the agreements reached the day before; that he was going to pass along the north bank of the canal and that, scrupulously respecting these agreements, he would not push any further in the direction of Peking until the decision to be taken at the conference of generals to be held in the afternoon. At the same time, he asked the American general to inform him of his own intentions. General Chaffee declared that he was going to occupy, with his troops, the small village at the dam, and that, in accordance with the agreements that the general had just reminded him of, he would limit his operations there for the day.

From nine to ten o'clock, the barrage was crossed, not without great difficulty for the artillery. Major Feldmann was billeted with two companies in the village, with orders to maintain liaison with the American contingent: the rest of the troops bivouacked on the other bank, minus the field battery, which was left with one company on the south bank. From the roof of a pagoda, through a gap in the trees, which are very numerous in this region, we could see a few metres of the walls of the Tartar city, which loomed over the horizon at a distance of about 2,500 metres.

During the night, at about two o'clock in the morning, while the French column was marching from Tong-Tcheou towards Peking, a very lively fusillade, interspersed with cannon fire, was heard in the distance, in the direction of the Chinese capital; it continued, with very long interruptions, until about ten thirty or eleven o'clock in the morning, when it ceased completely. Given the agreements of the previous day, and what had transpired from the results of the reconnaissance of the various contingents who had indicated that the road to Peking was free, it seemed inadmissible that this fusillade and cannonade already indicated an action undertaken by allied corps against the defenders of the capital. This was the opinion of the two French and American generals, who attributed it to an attack on the Legations by the Chinese. A native taken prisoner by the French column at about ten o'clock in the morning confirmed this hypothesis by his statement. At the most, it could be presumed that the shooting was the result of some demonstration by the advanced detachments of the Japanese contingent against one of the eastern gates of the Tartar City, with a view to drawing the defenders of Peking to that side and facilitating the subsequent crossing of the walls of the Chinese City, in fulfilment of one of the orders of the French General.



of the many plans sketched out in private conversations between some of the allied chiefs. In any case, as soon as the arrangements for the bivouac had been made, the general asked a captain attached to the Russian Legation in China, who had marched from Tong-Cheu with the French column, to try to get in touch with the headquarters of his corps of operations, in order to inform General Linewitch that the entire French column was concentrated at the first dam of the Imperial Canal. This officer returned half an hour later, without having found any trace of the passage of the Russian corps, and declaring that it seemed to him very imprudent to venture, without being in strength, into the immense gap that existed between the French and Russian corps. Small infantry patrols sent forward and on the right flank - the only ones that the column could, at the time, assign to reconnaissance, due to its very small strength - did not report the presence of any troops or natives within a radius of 600 to 800 metres around the barrage. As for its cavalry, the French corps had only a few men whose horses, like the officers' small Annamite mounts, were exhausted. Men and animals were put to rest.

In the meantime, at about ten o'clock and again at about ten thirty in the morning, cannon shots were fired by the American battery which had established itself at the level of the village of the barrage, on a low rise of ground. Captain Bobo and Ensign de Grancey were immediately sent to General Chaffee to enquire about the purpose of this artillery action. They found this general officer, mounted, with some other officers, on the roof of a hut, binoculars in hand, observing the points of fall of the projectiles fired by his battery. The general replied: "Tell the French general that I am allowing the cannon to fire on the two villages situated in front and on my left, where there are some Boxers; that once these villages are occupied, I will stop my troops there, as was agreed at the conference.

Around three o'clock in the evening, M. d'Anthouard and the Russian attaché captain were sent to seek information. At about half-past four, General Frey, accompanied by Captain Bobo, his orderly, the interpreter Mr Wilden, the Chinese prisoner, and escorted by two cavalymen, set off himself, across the fields, in the direction in which he assumed the Russian and Japanese camps were to be established, and where the new conference of allied leaders was to be held.

It was only around six o'clock in the evening that the General found a group of Japanese soldiers who led him along the paved road to their General-in-Chief. Surrounded by around twenty officers, all impeccably gloved in white and with large maps unfurled before their eyes, General Yamaguchi was giving his orders on the ground: these were no doubt his final instructions for directing the march of his troops into the Chinese capital. He informed General Frey that the Russians had, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, launched two battalions and a battery into the Chinese City through the Toung-Pien-Men gate; that the entire Russian corps should have been there by this time; that he, for his part, had just given orders to two of his battalions to throw themselves into Peking, following the Russians; finally, that at nightfall he intended to use dynamite to overthrow the Chi-Koua-Men gate, in front of which he was being held up by vigorous enemy resistance, and then to enter the Tartar city with most of his troops. As none of the Japanese officers present understood French, it was with the greatest difficulty that this information was communicated to them.

are obtained. There was no point in prolonging an interview under such difficult conditions. Faced with the urgent need to get as accurate an idea as possible of the general situation before ordering his own movements, General Frey asked General Yamaguchi to have him taken to the Russian camp and first to see his chief of staff, General Fukushima, who had some knowledge of our language and who, in any case, spoke perfect English. He was at the advances, at the very gate of Tchi-Koua-Men; a staff officer accompanied the general. After a very long wait, close to this gate, this officer came to inform him that General Fukushima had left with the two Japanese battalions for the Toung-Pien-Men gate.

It was eight o'clock in the evening: after a lot of talking and gesturing, the general finally made the Japanese officer understand that he wanted to get to the Russian headquarters at the Toung-Pien-Men gate as quickly as possible. It was impossible to take the road leading directly to the Russian headquarters, along the foot of the ramparts, as General Frey had wished, as the ramparts were still occupied by the Chinese, who fired on anything near the wall.

This is the place to respond to some criticisms that have been made - not abroad, but in France - about the role played by General Frey on 14 August, in which he is reproached for having thought it necessary to comply with the decision taken by the allied generals in council at Tong-Tchéou on the 12th, to hold a new conference on the afternoon of the 14th, under the walls of Peking, to settle the conditions of the attack on the Chinese capital; to have wasted most of the day of the 14th looking for the Russian camp where this meeting was to take place; to have arrived in the Legations district only *fifteen hours* after the allied troops.

1° General Frey's decision to establish his troops at the bivouac of the first dam was rational in more ways than one, even if it was not absolutely necessary, and first of all, in that it was dictated by feelings of loyalty and military confraternity which could not be held against a leader who made it a point of honour to scrupulously respect the agreements reached between the contingent commanders, following the information they had received on the situation of the Legations. The general thus took up position, at the appointed time, on the point assigned as the meeting place for the allied corps.

2° In view of the great fatigue experienced by most of the troops making up the small French corps that the General had succeeded in bringing under the walls of Peking<sup>[6]</sup>, it was essential - even if, contrary to the agreed conventions, immediate action was necessitated by an unforeseen circumstance - to give these troops a few hours' rest before bringing them into line, so as not to be led to require of them a new effort, perhaps a considerable one, which could only have been made under very bad conditions.

3° General Frey was convinced that if, as could not be foreseen, and which in fact did not happen - the fighting by the Russians and the Japanese could be considered as the engagement of vanguards or strong reconnaissance - serious general action were to take place under the walls of the Chinese capital, the contingents facing the enemy would not be able to take part in the war.

would not fail to call upon the three fine batteries of artillery and the small handful of elite troops that made up the small French corps.

4° In view of such an eventuality, the choice of the village of the first dam, as a holding position or as a general reserve position, straddling a canal, impassable in any other part than at these dams, and which divided into two groups the allied forces spread out to the north and south of this canal, allowed the French corps to manoeuvre, if necessary, on either bank and to move quickly to all the points where its intervention might become necessary.

On the other hand, as soon as General Frey was aware of the morning's events, his main concern was to ensure that the French corps was represented among the troops who were to enter Peking that very day. He had to wait for two long hours, beyond his control, in the Japanese camp near the Chi Koua Men gate, which meant that the French troops did not enter Peking at the same time as the first Russian and Japanese detachments; But even in this circumstance, national self-respect could be safeguarded, because the general and a small French corps, composed of infantry and artillery, had crossed the Toung-Pien-Men gate, in other words had entered Peking, on the same day as the other allies, - on 14 August, before midnight.

Finally, and this is a materially inaccurate assertion, it was not *fifteen hours after the allied troops* that the French troops entered the Legations district. Only a few hours after the arrival of the first Russian and Japanese detachments - the rest of these contingents were not due to enter Peking until the following day - our troops were established in front of the Ha-Ta-Men gate, close to and almost opposite the Legations and, at about four o'clock in the morning, that is to say, about eight hours after the first Russian troops, and only two or three hours after the battalions of the Japanese General Manabé, who had followed the top of the ramparts, the French corps itself entered the Rue des Légations.

These are undoubtedly small facts, of no great importance, and of a sentimental rather than a military nature; but, for reasons that will not escape anyone, it seemed necessary to bring them into focus.

To continue the account of this episode, which was so strikingly interesting because of the serious and unusual circumstances in which it took place, we will leave the floor for a few moments to one of the young people who took part in this nocturnal excursion: the vividness of the impressions he reported proves that, although the body was exhausted, the mind and heart were always alert.

"We set off again, all dreamy, on our horses that were having the greatest difficulty walking. Off to the Russian camp! Our guides didn't seem to know the way very well; one of the Japanese soldiers was unwell; we left him with one of his comrades who would take him back to his camp. We had been on the march for about half an hour when, behind us, on our right, we heard two loud bangs: we presumed that they came from the explosion of the dynamite charges with which the Japanese had intended to overthrow Chi-Koua-Men.

"Finally, after many detours, we came upon a Russian post at about nine o'clock. The captain, as soon as he was informed of our arrival, went to meet us; he offered us some grapes, which seemed to us to be exquisitely fresh and tasty, and gave us two Cossacks to accompany us, after confirming to us by signs that the Russians had entered Peking. A little after nine o'clock in the evening, we finally arrived at the gate of Toung-Pien-Men. A Russian field battery was camped 300 metres from the walls; it had entered the Chinese city a moment after the Japanese had passed through. Delayed in its march, having received a few shots, and finding itself without infantry support, its commander rightly judged it prudent to turn back and come and bivouac outside the town. Large fires were lit, around which a few soldiers, no doubt the battery cooks, were already busy plucking chickens and ducks.

"The general quickly dictated some instructions to me, which I wrote by the light of these fires. On the advice of the general, the battery commander had the fires closest to the ramparts extinguished. It was about time; about twenty bullets whistled over our heads: they were the greetings of the Chinese who were still occupying the nearby Tartar wall.

"Immediately afterwards, I received the order to go, with a cavalryman, Mr Wilden and the Chinaman, to our bivouac at the dam, to bring back as soon as possible two companies and a section of artillery, with which the general wanted to enter Peking without delay. The rest of the column, minus the field battery, which will be left temporarily at the barrage, with infantry support, will follow the movement that same night. On the way, let's keep an eye on our sentries so that they don't mistake us for Chinese. From time to time, as we skirt the bank of the canal, where, in the darkness of a barely starlit night, we risk rolling with our horses, I whistle my "siren"; we have already used it a little in recent days on our night marches, and our sentries will recognise it well. In fact, we reached the outposts without a hitch; we were recognised from quite a distance, and the path that had been blocked for the night was cleared to let us pass. Everyone in the camp was already resting, but as news of the Russians' entry into Peking had just reached the camp - brought by M. d'Anthouard, who had also managed to establish contact with Japanese and Russian officers - we expected to follow the movement at any moment. So the designated fractions were quickly ready. On the orders of the general, a good bonus was given to the poor captured Chinese who had served as our guide, a Boxer perhaps, who the emotions of the day and the lack of his usual opium had made more dead than alive, and who was unable to continue marching.

On our way to Peking!" The moon was now shining on us, and its mocking smile seemed to mock the disappointment we felt, our general even more than ourselves, at not being among the first to bring news from the mother country to the besieged of the French Legation. It was half past ten when we arrived 200 metres from the Toung-Pien-Men gate; the small column had stopped for a moment and was massed nearby behind a group of houses.

"Two bridges, a short distance apart, very well swept by machine-gun fire (the Russians learned this morning to their cost), separated us from the gate. A

A French post was left at the entrance to the first, to help guard the passage and at the same time give directions to the French troops who were to follow. A few minutes later, the column entered under a long, curved arch pierced through the thickness of the wall: this was Toung-Pien-Men; a Russian post was set up there. The brave General Wassilewsky, Chief of Staff of the Russian troops, with a bullet hole in his chest, was moaning on a stretcher in a sort of guardhouse; beside him, a row of wounded Russian officers and soldiers were still lying on straw along the walls; many corpses of officers and soldiers who had been killed had also been gathered nearby and lay there, covered with their coats as shrouds. The general stopped for a moment to enquire about the condition of the wounded, and in particular that of the general, with whom he was on the most friendly terms.

"In the meantime, the small column, warned not to disturb the rest of our wounded brothers in arms as it crossed this passage, passed quietly under the archway and entered the Chinese City. Allied troops had penetrated Peking, but most of the high walls of the Tartar City were still occupied by the Chinese. Guided by Messrs de Grancey and d'Anthouard, who know the capital very well, we follow a street in the city whose buildings will show us the impact of these walls. The column marched cautiously, as there was no guarantee that a hail of bullets would not rain down on us from the houses lining the road. From time to time, a group of houses in the middle of the grass reminds us that we are not in open country; there is no trace of the detachments that preceded us. The little troop moved forward silently, always along the same seemingly endless street. Smoking and talking were forbidden; the men were ordered to keep their bayonets and quarters in their left hands to avoid any rattling. At last the road widened: we had just entered one of the city's main streets. The houses had their doors and windows closed; we passed by without trying to find out whether they were occupied or not; what we had to do was get to the Legations as quickly as possible. It was about midnight; the column had stopped; it was closing on a Japanese detachment, left in the care of carriages belonging, no doubt, to the two battalions of this contingent which, according to the information gathered, had preceded us by barely an hour or two. These cars had been unable to go any further because of the defence works that were clogging up the road near the Ha-Ta-Men gate, next to the Legations. Ha-Ta-Men is indeed there; it will allow us to pass from the Chinese city into the Tartar city and enter the grounds of the Legations. Messrs de Grancey and d'Anthouard went to reconnoitre the surrounding area: they found that the gate was closed and that there was a great deal of disorder in the vicinity, caused in particular by numerous groups of Chinese fleeing in all directions. There is no point, and no urgency, in trying to get through the gate at this time of day, as there are bound to be mistakes.

"Arrangements were made to wait for daylight at this point. The street is wide enough; sections of infantry are deployed in such a way as to enable them to fire, if necessary, at the roofs of the houses along it, as well as in front and behind; the two guns of the artillery section (Lieutenant Lefèvre) are placed in battery in a position where they can respond to any unforeseen attack coming from any direction. The other troops lay down on the spot, each man keeping his rifle close at hand.

"The doors of the houses near which the column has taken up residence, most of them shops or restaurants, remain hermetically sealed. From outside, however, you can hear, from time to time, through the partitions, various noises: furniture moving, words exchanged in a low voice, coughing fits, barely contained, of some old man or a sick person, and other signs that all these houses are occupied. And the truth is, if you could look inside, you would see whole families, trembling and frightened, prostrate before the altar that adorns each fireplace and, - like pious Christian mothers offering candles to the Virgin, invoking her to save their children from danger, - just as these poor people burn a number of incense sticks, imploring the tutelary spirits of their ancestors, the local genies and Buddha himself, to extend their omnipotent protection over them at this critical time. Most of them cursed, in their heart of hearts, these Boxers, the cause of their terrors and whose exactions they had no doubt already had to suffer, judging by the number of burnt houses that the column, on its march, encountered in this part of the Chinese City. Some of them even came out of hiding to ingratiate themselves with the victors, offering the soldiers cups of their best tea and cigarettes.

"The general has chosen a slightly wider corner of the pavement, overlooked by a small wooden balcony, to rest on among the troops. With my revolver as a pillow and my helmet over my eyes to protect them from the cool of the night, I lay down on the ground and prepared to enjoy the sweetness of a well-earned sleep. Unfortunately, the general next to me is not letting me go yet:

"You'll have to take note of this... Did you do that? I don't know what I'm answering; an imperious need to sleep has taken hold of me; I give in to it. I slept like this for a few hours. At one point, I dream that a friendly hand is pouring the sweetest perfumes over me. I woke up, my limbs aching, my clothes soaked by a light rain that must have been falling for some time and was ending in a violent storm. It's nearly four o'clock: the day is beginning to dawn; we get up, shake off the stress and get ready to resume our walk. We immediately headed for the Ha-Ta-Men gate, which was wide open at the time. On the way, we came across a few foreign soldiers knocking on the doors of houses that looked a little different, trying to get them to open and ask for tea; through the half-open doors, frightened heads appeared; hands held out trays laden with cups filled with this liquid. Here we are in the Tartar city, skirting its walls for a moment and soon arriving in the Rue des Légations.

"According to the information we had, this district of the Legations had a particular appearance that set it apart from the rest of the Chinese capital. The Rue des Nations-Etrangères, which ran along its entire length, formed a wide, clean, very well-maintained thoroughfare, with well aligned buildings, etc. When you arrived there, you had the illusion of being in a city. On arriving there, you had the illusion of a European city district. Alas! what changes in a short space of time! It's impossible to recognise your way through the accumulated obstacles and ruins! Everywhere, sections of wall licked by the flames and blackened by the fire! Some are pierced by thousands and thousands of holes, showing that, among these enemies who had so many means of destruction at their disposal, there were some who did not hesitate to use the most primitive methods to produce a result that they could easily have obtained with a few blows of a pickaxe. Everywhere, rubble piled on top of rubble! In the main street and in the alleyways

Here and there, cuts in the road, trenches, open passages in the walls to connect the houses. A few almost rotting corpses of Celestials littered the ground. It was truly a spectacle of desolation and horror! The determination of the Chinese to destroy everything in what was once the European quarter, the incredible effort made by a handful of brave men to resist the furious and continuous attacks of this horde of madmen, are all enigmas. How is there a single European left standing? How can you explain that these Chinese, after having defied the whole of Europe by massacring one of its representatives, and after having persisted for two months in their feelings of hatred, were unable to overcome, with the weapons they had and their numbers, which could always grow, a few sailors and a few volunteers who were far from being prepared to withstand a siege of such violence and of such duration!

"Once through the Ha-Ta-Men gate and over the first obstacles, the head of the column stopped to allow the units to regroup. In the eerie calm that enveloped us, our bugles sounded their clear, vibrant notes. We felt stirred and proud to finally set foot on the soil of this capital. The wishes we had all expressed when we left Tien-Tsin had at last been fulfilled! It's true that our men's clothes are in tatters, but they have nothing to be ashamed of: on the contrary, they can be proud of it.

"Leaving Tien-Tsin anaemic and tired, with only the dirty blue cloth they had hastily brought with them from Indo-China, with three days' worth of food on them, without a supply convoy, most of them marching night and day on dusty or broken roads, sleeping anywhere and everywhere, they put in the maximum effort that could be asked of a troop. This was because they were 'marsouins' first and foremost, and also because they were supported by the words of our general, who from time to time stimulated their ardour by giving them a glimpse of the prospect of entering Peking. "Come on, my friends, make another effort: show that you are worthy of the infantry and naval artillery! Peking is here! Which of you will not be proud to say later: 'I witnessed the capture of Peking'?" (*Notes from an orderly - Captain Bobo*).

A few volunteers from the Legations had recognised the French bells and rushed to meet the column: officers and soldiers soon saluted the three-coloured flag flying proudly over what was once the French Legation! The French, Italian and Austrian sailors, the surviving heroes of a glorious episode, gathered there, joy in their eyes as they greeted us with repeated shouts of "Long live the marsouins! Long live France! The column stopped at this point; the men would finally be able to rest on French soil!

The general, with a few officers, went without delay to the English Legation where all the ministers, without exception, and their staff had gone, from the start of hostilities, with their wives and children, according to a plan agreed in the first days of June between the representatives of the Powers and all the commanders of the detachments of the Legations, in anticipation of a siege. The French minister was the last to go there, on 20 June, at nine o'clock in the evening, accompanied by the Spanish minister, Mme Pichon and Mme de Rosthorn, wife of the Austro-Hungarian chargé d'affaires <sup>[7]</sup>. Their place was there, in fact, where they could deliberate, if need be,

and still act as representatives of the Powers, rather than, scattered on different points, at the front, in a trench, rifle in hand, taking orders from a captain or a lieutenant, and in the midst of soldiers whose defence they could have hindered<sup>[8]</sup>. At the British Legation, moreover, the danger was the same as in the other Legations, and one also found oneself in a position of honour. It is true that the buildings were less severely damaged than at the Austrian, Italian and French legations, but everywhere there were only traces of shells and bullets. The external doors were lined with brick drums; all the openings of the buildings were, for the greater part of their height, closed with materials of all kinds, in particular with earthbags. Everything was used to make the bags: blankets, bed sheets, canvas and silk cushions, men's and women's clothes; some were even made from silk dresses! It's the triumph of the "barbette"," exclaimed one officer, enthused by the sight of these improvised defences, and it has to be said that the pioneers who presided over their organisation, some of whom exchanged the pen they held the day before for the shovel, pickaxe and rifle, are in no way inferior to many technicians who have swooned over learned treatises on fortification and the study of accessory defences!

After crossing several large courtyards, the general and the officers finally arrived in the part of the building reserved for the French Legation. The Minister of France, Mr Pichon, had been informed and quickly went to meet them. Despite the early hour, Mme Pichon, Mmes Berteaux, Saussine and Filippini soon appeared in their turn, holding hands with frail, graceful children, their cheeks pale with deprivation, and opening wide their eyes in astonishment at seeing these Europeans they did not know, these soldiers dressed up like "bandits", so warmly welcomed by all! The entire French Legation and Lieutenant Darcy, at the head of his detachment of valiant sailors, were there together! There were hugs and kisses, friendly hands embraced, and joy painted on everyone's faces. Emotion caused a few tears to flow. At last, this time, deliverance! This constant obsession with the fate of the besieged, this awful nightmare that pursued them night and day, has come to an end! Thoughts turn to those who, far, far away in France, have been waiting for this blessed hour with agonising anxiety for a long time! And from the depths of their hearts, a surge of profound gratitude rises to heaven! Some regret mingles with these outpourings, for one thinks with sadness of the brave men who lie in a little corner of the garden to which the arrivals are led, as if to a place of pilgrimage, a cemetery improvised under enemy fire, and whose ground was long contested foot by foot by the besieged against the assailants. There, sleeping their last sleep, side by side, united in the same fate, mowed down in their prime, in their youth, all those - leaders, sailors and volunteers - who paid with their lives for their devotion to the common salvation! Their valour, their heroic end, like that of the brave men who fell in the defence of Pétang, will have their glorious page in the military annals of our beloved France. "Their story of a summer should be engraved somewhere in gold letters, lest it be forgotten too quickly, and it should be certified as such, because soon it would no longer be believed" (P. Loti). (P. Loti.)

The relief troops looked as tired and haggard as the besieged! It's because the objective they had been set had not been achieved without a great deal of hardship: heat, lack of sleep, the speed of the march, and sometimes even a lack of food. But when you look at the results and the expressions of gratitude they received, everyone feels that they have been amply rewarded for all their efforts!



Mme Pichon, assisted by the other French ladies, did not forget her duties as mistress of the house, even under these circumstances, and honoured the newcomers with a snack that took on the proportions of a veritable feast. A slice of bread - the column had been completely deprived of it for ten days - foie gras pâté, butter and mortadella! But, really, they were not yet as pitiable as feared, these revenants who, according to the newspapers of Europe, had long since suffered the worst torments! In fact, there were still a few provisions left, which our heroines, like thrifty housewives, had carefully reserved for the days of extreme famine. First we ate the cattle, rice and wheat that we had been able to lock up in such a hurry when hostilities began and left no doubt as to the intentions of the Chinese; the mules and horses followed; these few canned foods were the last cartridges. A glass of Champagne was the last surprise offered to the arrivals. They drank to the deliverance of the besieged, to their heroic defenders, to the brave men who had fallen under the Chinese bullets; they drank to the army, the navy, the Republic, France, to everything that is so dear to us abroad, where, far from internal dissensions and party quarrels, the Patrie is seen only in a halo of grandeur, beauty and glory!

Once assembled, the column marched, bugles in the lead, through the whole of the Legations district, displaying the French colours and playing the beloved tones of our war marches. The column stretched out a little, forced to cross barricades, trenches and other obstacles, indisputable witnesses to the noble struggle that had just ended. And then, aren't the officers and soldiers happy to shake the hands that are held out to them as they pass? The column was then brought to a halt, the beams formed and the men put to rest to await further orders.

#### IV

The Allies still have an imperative duty to fulfil: the deliverance of the Catholic mission at Petang, of which the Legations have had no news for sixty days, even though this establishment is barely 3,000 metres from them. But this military action required serious preparation as well as being of interest to the general direction of Allied operations, as it would lead to the occupation of the town and the imperial gardens, which were still entirely in the hands of the Regulars. The American contingent that tried to enter the Imperial Palace through the South Gate on 15 August suffered 6 casualties, including a captain, and 19 wounded. On the other hand, the Japanese only managed to establish themselves in front of the North and East gates of the Imperial City on the evening of the same day, after 8 dead and 89 wounded, and did not succeed in forcing their way in until the following day. For its part, with the 350 infantrymen who made up its strength, the French corps could not think of undertaking the liberation of the Petang, on pain of running the risk of failure, as the general commanding the American contingent, who was to have taken part in this operation with 500 to 600 men, had just informed him that all his troops were engaged in an action against the Imperial Palace and that it was impossible for him to divest himself of any part of them. In agreement with the French Minister, General Frey therefore postponed the operation until the following day. That same evening, at the generals' conference, he told the contingent commanders of his plans and asked for the cooperation of a Russian battalion and a

This cooperation was readily granted. On 16 August, General Frey marched on Petang with the French contingent, reinforced by 30 Cossacks and 350 Siberian pioneers or riflemen; by 350 Englishmen or Sikhs; by the three small detachments of French, Austrian and Italian sailors, who had just defended the Legations so brilliantly, and finally by a group of combatants, of unusual composition, headed by the Minister of France and formed by the volunteers and staff of the Legation: Messrs. d'Anthouard, Morisse, Berteaux, Filippini, the medical officers Matignon and de Talayrach, Feit, Saussine, Pellicot, the Indo-China interpreter, Bouillard and Wilden, agents for the Hankéou-Pékin railway, Picard-Destelan, a customs employee, Bartholin, a representative of Crédit Lyonnais, Merghelynck, the first secretary of the Belgian Legation; a small elite escort, made up of people battle-hardened by the trials of the siege, with warm hearts, all claiming the honour of taking part in an operation to rescue their compatriots, and whose calmness under fire and intrepidity the General was able to appreciate, as he was pleased to proclaim on all occasions.

In the course of the action, the column was swollen by a further 250 Japanese, whom it found in front of the Yellow Gate of the Imperial City. The operation began at seven in the morning and ended at two in the afternoon. By ten o'clock, the road to Petang was open: Bishop Favier, the missionaries, a whole nation of indigenous Christians and the small French and Italian detachments assigned to the defence of Petang welcomed their liberators with inexpressible joy.

Finally, following a fierce street battle in which 600 Regulars or Boxers were killed, the column forced its way into the Forbidden City and seized the Colline-au-Charbon or Mée-Shan. From this first-rate stronghold, dominating the city of Peking by around sixty metres, the small international column held the palaces and the Imperial City under the threat of fire from French artillery pieces, which were immediately hoisted up there, thus confirming in the most dazzling way that the Allies had taken possession of the Chinese capital.

#### GENERAL H. FREY.

1. Numbers 188, 239, 246 and 250 of the *Yellow Book*, 1900-1901.  
On 23 July, President Mac-Kinley, in particular, wrote to the Emperor of China to put himself in communication with the international relief army, so as to cooperate with it in the rescue of the legations, the protection of foreigners and the establishment of order.
2. This short retrospective account of the circumstances which accompanied the capture of the capital of the Celestial Empire, of the causes and motives which may have influenced the Court's decisions - the result of which, there can be no doubt, was to favour, directly or indirectly, the operations of the international army during this period of the Pechi-li campaign, - seems to us to provide a plausible explanation of the ease with which this army of 14,000 men was able to advance as far as Tong-Tcheou, contrary to all forecasts, at the very moment when an agreement had just been reached between the Russians and the Japanese, under the terms of which the second half of August was fixed as the most favourable time for undertaking this march; where it was commonly believed that

the corps of operations was to number between 60,000 and 80,000 men. This explains the Chinese army's hasty abandonment of the two places of Ho-Si-Vou and Tong-Tchéou, which had to be defended, and also the complete lack of resistance from enemy troops between Tong-Tchéou and Peking, on the same plains of Pa-li-kaou where the Tartar hordes tried to stop the Franco-British expeditionary corps in 1860. The state of disorganisation in which the Chinese army undoubtedly found itself, as a consequence of the powerlessness to which the imperial authority had fallen, in Peking and in all the places where the Boxers were masters ; The demoralisation with which it may have been struck following the capture of the Walled City of Tien-Tsin and the fighting at Peitzang and Yang-Tsoun, are not enough, in our opinion, to explain the lack of resistance which the Allies encountered on their march and in the attack on the Chinese capital. It will perhaps be advisable to take some account of these observations in the judgement which will be passed on the general value of the elements which made up the army of the Celestial Empire in 1900. Let us add that recently published documents tend to establish that in various circumstances of the second period of this Chinese campaign, the inaction of which the Chinese generals were reproached was reasoned, systematic, and was justified by the formal orders that these generals had received from their government.

3. This story will be published shortly by Hachette.
4. In a meeting which General Frey had with Li-Hung-Chang at General Linéwitch's house in Tien-Tsin in September 1900, this high-ranking mandarin lamented the irreparable misfortunes which had befallen his country, and deplored the loss of wealth of all kinds contained in the many establishments in the Chinese capital.

General Linéwitch made no secret of the fact that most of the depredations committed in Peking, and which would be attributed to the international troops, were the work of his compatriots, Boxers and others, who, in control of the capital, had given themselves over to unbridled pillaging on all sides. The two generals assured him that, as far as they were concerned, they had done everything in their power to oppose the atrocities of all kinds that are the inevitable consequence of any assault on a city. The noble example set by this venerable old man, almost eighty years old, who, full of honours and riches, longing only for rest and worn out, so ill that he could only walk supported by two of his servants, did not hesitate to brave the fatigue and dangers of all kinds that awaited him, and to spend what was left of his intelligence, energy and life to try to pull his country out of the calamities it was facing, is the best testimony that the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice is not the exclusive prerogative of the Western races.

5. All the detachments that set out from Tien-Tsin before the 10th and from Yang-Tsoun before the 8th and 9th August, including the Jagniatkowski company, which left Tien-Tsin on the morning of the 9th, were, as already mentioned, under the walls of Peking at seven o'clock on the morning of the 14th. The other detachments marched as follows:  
11th August, at 6 o'clock in the evening, departure from Yang-Tsoun of a detachment (Lieutenants Pol and Timonier) with a strength of 80 men, which had not been put on the road that very morning, to enable it to take with it a section (Second Lieutenant Martin), with a strength of 27 men, which had arrived in Yang-Tsoun in the morning. On 12 August, the same detachment arrived at Ho-Si-Vou, and on the evening of 13 August, at Matou, where it was waiting for artillery equipment.

which travelled up the Peï-Ho by junks. This detachment, now down to 100 men, arrived in Peking on 18 August, with Major Brénot, who had had to leave command of his group on the 12th due to illness, and travel to Tong-Tchéou by junk.

10th August, in the morning, the Vincent detachment arrives in Tien-Tsin. Departure in the evening for Yang-Tsoun. On the 12th, at 6 o'clock in the evening, this detachment arrived in Yang-Tsoun. Departure from this locality on the evening of 13th August, under the orders of Colonel de Pélaçot. Arrival at Ho-Si-Vou on the morning of the 14th. The detachment commander, realising at this point that he would not be able to join General Frey under the walls of Peking on the morning of the 13th, slowed his march and reached Tong-Tchéou on the 17th and Peking on the 20th August.

There are a number of lessons to be drawn from an examination of the preceding facts: 1° In order to obtain an exceptional effort from a troop, whether it be a large or small unit, the leader must have complete faith in success: only then will he be able to communicate the same feelings to his subordinates and reciprocally obtain from them the most absolute support.

2° In Europe, small detachments and sometimes even fairly large units achieve surprising results in the execution of trial or training marches. When these same elements find themselves, in a campaign outside Europe, in the presence of difficulties stemming mainly from the inclemency of the climate, the results on which one can count are quite different, no matter how much goodwill the soldier brings to satisfy his leaders. For example, the distances to be covered on these forced marches between Tien-Tsin and Peking were only 130 kilometres, and only about 100 kilometres between Yang-Tsoun and the capital. We know how difficult it was to cover these distances with the various allied contingents.

In our colonies, marches of this nature can only be carried out by indigenous troops accompanied by mounted European officers and non-commissioned officers. Our colonial annals abound in the feats accomplished by columns formed in this way. One example, which bears some similarity to the one we are dealing with here, is the forced march of the French column which operated against Samory's army on the left bank of the Upper Niger in 1885. In order to reach Samory's army and then pursue it, the column covered almost 200 kilometres in four days in a very difficult region.

6. Factions that had arrived in Tien-Tsin at Tong-Tchéou at nine o'clock the previous evening had to set off again at midnight.
7. It was only a few days later that Mme de Rosthorn, following private incidents between M. de Rosthorn and a member of the English Legation, left that Legation. After residing for a few days in a pavilion of the French Legation, which was still standing, and where they found themselves at the very moment of one of the fiercest attacks directed against this Legation, Mr and Mrs de Rosthorn went to the German Legation, which had no accredited representative of the head of that State, following the assassination of Baron Retteler, but only two secretaries, Messrs de Below and de Bergen.
8. The Ministers who had entrusted the defence of their Legation to the commander of their detachment took care, the Minister of France being the first, to visit their Legation almost every day, as much to encourage the defenders as to ascertain their needs, in order to request, during their Council meetings, the means to meet them.

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