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Admiralty, 1st October, 1900.

DESPATCHES of which the following are copies, have been received from the Commander-in-Chief and the Rear-Admiral on the China station, relative to the attempted relief of the legations at Peking; the capture of the Taku forts; and operations at Tientsin:—

Letter No. 384, from Commander-in-Chief on the China Station, dated 27th June, 1900.

Combined Naval Expedition to attempt the Relief of Legations at Peking.

No. 384.

Sir, Tientsin, 27th June, 1900.

WITH reference to my Submission No. 366 of 30th May forwarding copies of telegrams I had received from H.M. Minister on the above subject, I have the honour to report the course of events since that date.

On 29th May I received a telegram from H.M. Consul at Tientsin reporting that Fengtai, the railway station next to Peking, had been burnt, also five stations on the Peking-Hankau line, and on the following day (30th) H.M. Minister at Peking informed me that the situation there was "extremely grave, the soldiers mutinous and people very excited," and that European life and property was in danger.

Both the "Orlando" and "Algerine" were then at Taku, and thirteen ships of various other nationalities. The "Algerine" on her arrival on 30th had immediately disembarked twenty-five marines, who had been sent up as a guard for the Legation at Peking before it was known that affairs had assumed such a serious aspect. On the following day the "Orlando" landed fifty marines and sixty-seven seamen and the "Algerine" ten seamen. The "Algerine's" men were subsequently sent back to their ship, from which they could not well be spared, and were replaced on 4th June by a field gun's crew from "Centurion."

The men were disposed of as follows:—Captain Bernard M. Strouts, R.M.L.I., commanding Tientsin Winter Guard; Captain Lewis S. T. Halliday, R.M.L.I., H.M.S. "Orlando"; Captain Edmund Wray, R.M.L.I., Wei-hai-wei detachment; 25 marines, Tientsin Winter Guard; 26 marines, H.M.S. "Orlando"; 25 marines, Wei-hai-wei detachment; making a total of 79 officers and men at Peking, and 104 seamen and marines at Tientsin.

The guards for Peking arrived there on 31st May by train, the total number of all nationalities forwarded to Peking being 337.

After receiving the Minister's telegram before mentioned, I decided, in view of the gravity of the situation, to proceed off Taku myself, and left on the afternoon of 31st with "Whiting" in company, leaving the Rear-Admiral (H.M.S. "Barfleur") at Wei-hai-wei, with orders to send on "Endymion," which was expected there the next day, and also the "Fame."

On arrival off Taku (13 miles distant from the anchorage) on 1st June, I telegraphed at once to H.M. Minister and informed him I was prepared to land two hundred more seamen and marines, and awaited an intimation of his wishes. On 2nd June a telegram from him was received (dated the previous day) stating that the guards had arrived at Peking without any opposition, and that affairs were quieter, at the same time asking if I was coming up. This I could not do, but on 3rd June I landed at Tongku and went to Tientsin by train to see the arrangements made for our guards, and also to have some conversation with our Consul, and learn as far as I could the actual state of affairs at Tientsin and in the neighbourhood.

While there, I heard that an attack had been made a day or two previously on an armed party of over thirty Belgians who were coming in with their families from Pao-ting-fu, on the Peking-Hankau railway line now under construction. It was supposed that some of the party had been killed as nine were missing.

I was also informed of the murder of an English missionary, Mr. Robinson, and the abduction of another, Mr. Norman, at Yung ching, some thirty miles from Tientsin. Bishop Scott asked me to send out a party to attempt to rescue Mr. Norman, but before any action could be taken it was ascertained that he too had been murdered.

The situation at the Palace was said to be strained, the Dowager Empress being credited with a wish to put down the Boxers, but not daring to do so on account of their numbers and support by some of the princes. It was rumoured that she contemplated withdrawing from Peking to the ancient capital, Sian Fu, in Shensi Province. My object in going to Tientsin was also partly to return to Taku by river in order to know something about it in case we required to use it for transport, &c. This I did and returned to my flagship.

On 4th June a gun's crew and gun were sent up from "Centurion" to Tientsin in response to a request from the Consul, and on 5th a force of one hundred men from "Centurion" was sent