

The Chinese opened fire on the ships rather earlier than was expected, but the proposed meeting was satisfactorily accomplished, and the men were put into the boats at the commencement of the bombardment to clear the "Algerine's" decks. Each man of the force received a ration of optional cocoa, handed down into the boats before shoving off, and this was consumed before the boats were allowed to leave.

Landing occupied half-an-hour, and was completed under heavy shell fire by 2.30 a.m. without mishap.

Allied forces consisted of:—

British: 23 officers, 298 men, Commanding officer, Commander C. Cradock, H.M.S. "Alacrity"; total, 321.

German: 3 officers, 130 men, Commanding officer, Commander Pohl, H.I.M.S. "Hansa"; total, 133.

Japanese: 4 officers, 240 men, Commanding officer, Commander Hattori, I.J.S. "Kasagi"; total, 244.

Russian: 2 officers, 157 men, Commanding officer, Lieutenant Stankewitch, 12th Regiment Tirailleurs, "D'Orient," Luberie; total, 159.

Italian: 1 officer, 24 men, Commanding officer, Lieutenant J. Tanca, I.M.S. "Calabria"; total, 25.

Austrian: 2 officers, 20 men, Commanding officer, Lieutenant Ernt. Tatniam's Qenta; total, 22—making a total of 904 officers and men.

It was arranged that, after an effective bombardment, the N.W. fort should be the first to be attacked, then the N. fort (on same side of the river), and finally, the long string of south forts on the other bank; before the advance, it was agreed that half the British should leave the firing line with the Italians on the left, Germans, Japanese, and that the other half of the British, the Russians and Austrians, should form the supports, and reserves.

The German and Japanese commanders were pleased to propose that I should direct proceedings, which I had the great honour to do.

At 2.45 a.m., when some 250 yards from the north face of the fort, the advance commenced, deploying from the right, which flank rested on the river bank; the whole ground a thousand yards this side of the fort was hard mud, but unfortunately quite flat, without a vestige of cover.

The objective of the British was to force or scale the west gate, and this done, to endeavour to gain an entrance into the inner fort, by means of another gate, the whereabouts of which was not quite clear. To do this they were to advance in skirmishing order, to within 50 yards of the moat on the north face, then close on the right, and swinging round the corner of the fort along the military road, the right flank leading in loose formation, seeking what cover the right bank might afford, and charge on the west entrance.

The advance continued until within 1,000 yards of the fort, when I could plainly see that, owing to the darkness, it had suffered little from gun fire, and was practically intact, no guns being silenced. I therefore halted the men and returned myself to consult the other commanding officers as to continuing; it was at once unanimously agreed, that to take it in its present condition, all its guns being still in action, would entail a serious and unnecessary loss of life, and it was therefore decided to retire slightly for the cover afforded by a bend in the river, and wait until the fort was further reduced.

It was not until 4.30 a.m., half-an-hour after dawn, that the heavy ordnance was finally

silenced by the ships, although two field guns which had been previously silenced, now commenced to play on the attacking party.

The second formation of attack was different to the first; on the previous retirement the "Alacrity" and "Endymion's" men had been ordered to remain 300 yards to the front, as an observation party. They were under cover of a small rising, and shortly before the advance were joined by the Russians on the left.

In the firing line were the "Alacrity's" and "Endymion's" on the right, Russians on the left, and Italians in loose formation immediately on the right flank, the military road slightly interfering with their getting into line. The "Barfleur's" closed in the rear of the fighting line, reinforcing while the charge was sounded. The foreign forces and the remainder of the British were in close support, the Russians inclining to the left to make their attack on the right rear.

When the charge was sounded the Japanese doubled up from the supports in column of route along the road, and raced with the British along the intervening 300 yards to the west gate, the two nations scaling the parapet together.

Part of the British force also gained an entrance through two gun ports, and over a low part of the ramparts to the right of the gates which were held by my officers through the instrumentality of Lieut. Duncan of H.M.S. "Algerine," who from previous observation on shore had found these weak spots.

The inner and second gate was forced by rifle fire from the British and Japanese, and this done the fort was practically ours.

As mentioned in my previous despatch the remaining forts were taken with slight resistance, and after the north fort was captured, the British and Germans were each able to turn and work one of the fort's guns on the still active artillery in the south fort across the river.

Enclosed is a despatch I have the honour to forward.

I have the honour to enclose letter received from Lieut. Jno. Tanca, I.M.S. "Calabria," whose force of 25 men had been linked with the British, which he has insisted I should forward, and I have therefore given him a letter couched in similar terms.

I cannot close this despatch without mentioning the capital behaviour of the men, more especially as there were amongst them many ordinary seamen and lately joined stokers. I would especially remark on the fine examples set by Lieut. Eric Charrington, of H.M.S. "Alacrity," and Lieut. R. Hulbert, of H.M.S. "Endymion," in the firing line, both being worthy of the highest praise. I would also respectfully bring before your notice the pluck and ability of my two A.D.C.'s, Midshipman Dennis Herbert, H.M.S. "Orlando," and Midshipman Lionel Shore, H.M.S. "Barfleur," also the conduct of Midshipman G. Dix, H.M.S. "Barfleur," who undoubtedly saved his lieutenant's life.

Surgeon Robley Browne, H.M.S. "Alacrity," was quick in his aid and assiduous in his attention to the wounded.

I have, &c.,

CHRISTOPHER CRADOCK,
Officer Commanding British
Land Force, Taku.

To Rear-Admiral J. Bruce,
H.M.S. "Barfleur."