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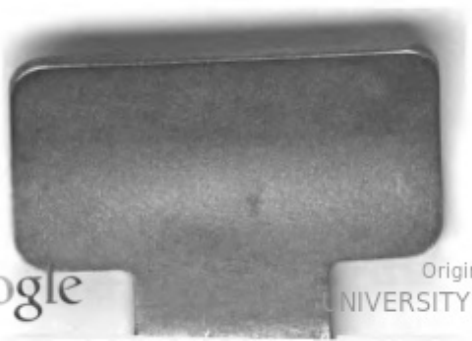

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On Active Service with the Chinese Regiment

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ON ACTIVE SERVICE WITH THE CHINESE REGIMENT

A RECORD OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE FIRST CHINESE REGIMENT IN NORTH CHINA FROM MARCH TO OCTOBER 1900.

BY CAPTAIN A. A. S. BARNES

LONDON: GRANT RICHARDS
LEICESTER SQUARE, MCMII

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TO THE

FEW OFFICERS AND COLOUR-SERGEANTS

WHO BY THEIR HARD AND UNREMITTING WORK

MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR

THE CHINESE REGIMENT

TO PLAY ITS PART IN THE

STIRRING INCIDENTS HEREIN

BUT INDIFFERENTLY

RELATED

I OFFER THIS LITTLE BOOK

"LEST WE FORGET"

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INTRODUCTION

EVERY book, more or less, is written with an object of some sort, and this little one is no exception to this general rule.

So many unkind things have been said about the Chinese regiment, by people with no knowledge of the matter, that it has seemed advisable to place on record the doings of the regiment on service, in the real hard fighting in Northern China in 1900, as they actually occurred, in order to show that, though a regiment in its extreme infancy, fighting, under alien officers and for an alien cause, against its own compatriots, its own Emperor, and his Imperial troops, it bore its part with the best, deserving none of the somewhat nasty things that have been put abroad about it; but, on the other hand, more than fulfilling the high hopes formed of it by its officers, and by those in high military authority who caused its formation.

People, moreover, with memories of remarkable brevity have, to all appearances, quite forgotten that the regiment saw any fighting at all. The

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memories of these will, I trust, be refreshed, both by my own contributions, and by those of others set out in the Appendices attached hereto. The various cuttings referred to possibly form the most valuable part of the book, for they, at all events, can claim absolute impartiality—a virtue that I am naturally only able to strive after, with indifferent success. Historically, I can claim that all related herein as to the doings of the Chinese regiment is correct so far as anything can humanly be, and that is, after all, the main point.

I regret to see my own name and the first person singular appear so very often, but when one is only setting down what one saw, or did, or saw done one's self, it is hard to see how this can be avoided. I have sought for, and obtained, much assistance from others who were where I was not, and saw what I did not see, so that I hope no one who was anywhere where things were stirring will find that important fact omitted. I can only say that I have tried my best to get the fullest details of all the "Shows," great and small, in which the regiment was represented, and if I have failed in any particular I must plead Not Guilty of intent.

If I seem to anyone unduly optimistic about the work done by our men during those trying times, I can only say that my views are fully shared by those who had the same chances of judging

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as I had, and that, in these matters, seeing is believing.

It will be seen, from a perusal of these pages, that, as a unit, the Chinese regiment was represented in more expeditions than any other corps. To say nothing of the original troubles round Wei-hai-wei, we had our part in Tientsin, the relief of Peking, and the smaller expeditions, on the 19th August 1900, that to Tu Liu, and the abortive one to Peitsang. No other regiment was represented in all these. In the Paoting-fu expedition, it is true, we took no part, as we had then returned to our own place, Wei-hai-wei; but we were, all the same, represented by Captain Brooke, who was signalling officer to the force from Tientsin.

Other corps, raised by our countrymen from more or less promising material, have proved their worth in the day of trial; but I do not believe anyone has had to undergo its baptism of fire in conditions and amid surroundings so hard as had the Chinese regiment. Our officers have led aliens against their own races often and often in our national history, but I doubt if the circumstances were ever before such as they were in North China in 1900. Our enemy was no mean one; he was well armed, well provided with artillery, and in every way our equal, except, of course, in the important matter of

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officers. He had fanaticism, religion, and pride, three of the strongest incentives to war, on his side, and if he lacked patriotism, as we know it, he possessed it, indirectly, in his hatred of, and his contempt for, all foreigners.

The Chinese, as a soldier, has many sterling qualities. He is very amenable to the discipline and control of those he knows; he is stout and well able to stand fatigue and hard work; he is a very good shot, taken all round; is no trouble to feed, as he has no prejudices on the subject, except it be in the matter of quantity; and, as I have endeavoured to show, he is good on service, whether on the actual field, or on those more frequent duties of a more peaceful and less exciting nature that fall to a soldier's lot at such times.

It may be asked how the excellence which I have ascribed to the Chinese regiment is to be accounted for, and here, of course, I can only give my own opinion, which is, that the behaviour of the men was due simply and solely to the steady drill all the recruits had, and have, to undergo. I am well aware that this same steady drill is regarded in some circles as old-fashioned and out-of-date, but without it, I am sure, no regiment of Chinese will ever succeed, whatever may be the case with other organisations more or less similar.

I have already referred to the assistance I have

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received from others with regard to matters outside my own personal knowledge, and I take this opportunity of thanking those to whom I am chiefly indebted — namely, Captains Watson, Toke, Bray, and Brooke, and Mr Schaller, for much valuable help.

A. A. S. BARNES.

WEI-HAI-WEI,
13*th October* 1901.

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ON ACTIVE SERVICE WITH THE CHINESE REGIMENT

PART I

THE TROUBLES ROUND WEI-HAI-WEI

CHAPTER I

WHO or what was responsible I do not consider it within my province to inquire, or even to conjecture, but certain it is that early in 1900, when all was quiet in other parts of China, the inhabitants of our territory round Wei-hai-wei were deeply affected with that bitter anti-foreign feeling which, later in the year, led to the Boxer rising, and its subsequent acts of war.

As soon as the approach of more clement weather made such things possible—to wit, early in March of that year—gatherings, whose sole and avowed object was the expulsion of the British, began to take place in two, if not three, sections of the territory, some two or three thousand men of all ages attending at each centre, on the average. The local village militia, or trained bands, were

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also called out, incense was burned, flags erected, arms dug out or bought, and things began, generally, to look lively.

Rumours of these goings-on naturally reached the ears of the authorities, and it was determined to nip the thing in the bud. Accordingly, on the 26th of March, information having previously reached him, Colonel Bower struck what was probably the first blow of a long series which China has since been dealt, to show her that the Western barbarian has come to stay. With no hint to anyone, the available men of the regiment, to the number of some 420, paraded at the usual hour, received ten rounds of ball ammunition per man, and started out along the road to Chefoo. At a temple, some five or six miles out, was found a gathering of some six or seven hundred men, who showed no signs whatever of enmity, but allowed the regiment to march through them, and quietly surround them. The ringleaders were then invited to come to the front and account for themselves. One of them requested Colonel Bower to dismount before he deigned to enter into conversation, but, needless to say, the Colonel remained mounted. Some of the more truculent members of the mob now began to shout and make those noises peculiar to all such assemblies, and, for a few minutes, things looked decidedly danger-

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ous. A most timely order, however, to fix bayonets, promptly carried out, turned the tide in favour of peace, and was at once followed by another to set about disarming the malcontents. A more weird collection has seldom been seen. There were a few more modern firearms, a large number of old matchlocks, all loaded with shot and slugs, but by far the greater number of these misguided peasants were content with sticks with old knives or bayonets lashed to one end, pitchforks, and other implements of peace rather than war. There were also three or four rusty old cannon, a big drum, and a telescopic trumpet, besides rough spears. In several cases the warriors were content with rifle barrels, which, no doubt, they thought contained all the virtues of the complete article. Three prisoners were then selected, including the gentleman who asked the Colonel to dismount, and the regiment returned to its barracks at Matou, laden with the somewhat cumbersome spoils of war.

Trivial and bloodless as this, the regiment's first real test, may seem, a little reflection will prove that it was really of vast importance, as being the first indication of what was afterwards so often and so abundantly shown—namely, the readiness of the men to stand by their officers, even against their own people.

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CHAPTER II

It has always struck me how providentially the initiation of the Chinese regiment into the actual mysteries of active service has been carried out. We began, as has been already recounted, with an absolutely bloodless, and almost friendly, dispersal of an unlawful gathering. At the time, there was not an officer, down to the latest arrival, who was not proud of the men, and of their behaviour on the occasion in question, or who was not as sure as could be that they could be fully relied on for sterner work, should the occasion arise. None, however, had any idea how close was the sterner work.

After the occurrence already related, things at once resumed their normal state, and the drilling of the recruit proceeded as it had done for the last year. It is curious, however, that just about this time (March 1900) we began to hear rumours of probable concerted action by the Powers, owing to the disturbed state of the country round Tientsin, and about the middle of the following month we had rumours that the said Powers had sent China an ultimatum on the "Boxer" business. It is also

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noteworthy that on Easter Saturday, April 14th, a Chinese cruiser arrived with the Taotai for the Wei-hai-wei Boundary Commission on board, and fired no salute, which omission caused some comment at the time.

On the 25th April the long-delayed Boundary Commission started. It consisted of Colonel Bower, Major Penrose, R.E., and Mr Schaller, Colonel Bower's Chinese Secretary, on our part, and of Taotais Li and Yen, and Captain Lin, Chinese Navy, on the part of China. The escort was found by No. 7 Company, under Captain Pereira, with Lieutenant Brooke and Colour-Sergeant Brook, and numbering some sixty men. Owing to some appearance of hostility on the part of the inhabitants, who had got some most extraordinary ideas as to the true inwardness of the Commission, No. 1 Company, under Lieutenant Toke, was sent out on the 30th to strengthen the escort.

That same evening, when the officers were at dinner, a message came from Major Bruce, who was in command in the absence of the Colonel, that he wanted to see all the officers at 9.30 P.M. He then announced that the Boundary Commission was in danger, and that he was going to their assistance at once. Accordingly, at 1 A.M. the men were roused, and at 3 A.M. Nos. 2, 4, and 5 Companies, about 170 strong, started for the camp at

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Tsao-miao-tze, about eighteen miles due south. Arriving about 9.30 A.M., we found all quiet, and no immediate danger to be looked for. The following morning the Boundary Commission, with its escort further reinforced by some of No. 5 Company, moved on, No. 2 and the rest of No. 5 returned to barracks, while No. 4 remained at Tsao-miao-tze as a sort of precaution.

It is impossible to leave this little scare without a word as to the behaviour of the men. Roused from their sleep at the dead of night and ordered to march out, armed and equipped, against their own people, by alien officers, not a murmur was heard, and not a man was there but showed the greatest zeal. On that long march, too, and in all the discomforts of the bivouac at its end, their cheerful alacrity and discipline were right good to behold. It is impossible to imagine any troops behaving better, and giving less trouble—in fact, they gave none at all. This we may safely call their second test—not a great one, perhaps, but still a test.

Things remained in what one can best describe as a neutral state, until Saturday the 5th May, when, as Major Penrose, R.E., was out at work on the boundary delimitation, accompanied by two of his own corps, Mr Schaller, and twelve men of the regiment, the party was suddenly attacked by

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