

CHINA BOXER REBELLION 1900-1901

As Western influence increased in China anti-European secret societies began to form. Among the most violent and popular was the I-ho-ch'uan (the Righteous and Harmonious Fists). Dubbed the "Boxers" by western correspondents, the society gave the Boxer Rebellion its name.

Throughout 1899 the I-ho-ch'uan and other militant societies combined in a campaign against westerners and westernised Chinese. Missionaries and other civilians were killed, women were raped, and European property was destroyed. By March 1900 the uprising spread beyond the secret societies and western powers decided to intervene, partly to protect their nationals but mainly to counter the threat to their territorial and trade ambitions.

By the end of May 1900 Britain, Italy, and the United States had warships anchored off the Chinese coast at Taku, the nearest port to Peking. Armed contingents from France, Germany, Austria, Russia, and Japan were on their way.

Loading horses for the NSW Citizens Bushman's
Contingent to China



on the Alantia, Sydney 1900

Australian colonies were keen to offer material support to Britain. With the bulk of forces engaged in South Africa, they looked to their naval contingents to provide a pool of professional full-time crews as well as reservist-volunteers including many ex-naval men. The reservists were mustered into naval brigades in which the training was geared towards coastal defence

by sailors capable of ship handling and fighting as soldiers.

When the first Australian contingents, mostly from New South Wales and Victoria, sailed on 8 August 1900, troops from eight other nations were already engaged in China. On arrival they were quartered in Tientsin and immediately ordered to provide 300 men to help capture the Chinese forts at Pei Tang overlooking the inland rail route. They became part of a force made up of 8,000 troops from Russia, Germany, Austria, British, India, and China serving under British officers. The Australians travelled apart from the main body of troops and by the time they arrived at Pei Tang the battle was already over.

Camden Remembers – China Boxer Rebellion 1900-1901

The entire naval brigade left China in March 1901. Six Australians died of sickness and injury, and none were killed as a result of enemy action. While they had been away the colonies from which they sailed only nine months before had become a federal commonwealth and Queen Victoria died in England.

(This summary was referenced from, and photograph courtesy of the Australian War Memorial)