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No. 5

Guisti, Ernest

**EARLY DAYS OF THE FIRST
MARINES — 1899-1902**

By Major Ernest Guisti, USMCR

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MARINE CORPS HISTORICAL REFERENCE SERIES

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EARLY DAYS OF THE FIRST MARINES

1899 - 1902

By

Major Ernest Guisti, USMCR

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Historical Branch, G-3
Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps
Washington, D. C.

November 1958

EARLY DAYS OF THE FIRST MARINES

The exploits of the 1st Marines fill some of the most colorful and stirring pages in the military annals of the United States. The oldest permanently organized regiment of the Marine Corps, the 1st Marines has served in peacetime, and fought in time of strife wherever the national interest of the United States dictated its commitment. The men of the regiment have literally fought "in every clime." The sweltering Marines who suffered the incredible hardships of the famous march of Samar, and the cold benumbed Marines who in the withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir kept the MSR open were men of the 1st Marines. It is enough merely to glance at the battle streamers of the regimental flag to gauge the long tradition and constant caliber of the 1st Marines. Many of the names need no explanation, even for the rawest recruit, the Boxer Rebellion, Philippine Insurrection, Guadalcanal, Peleliu, Okinawa and Inchon are but a few.

Although the first regiment of Marines was not organized until 1899, smaller units of Marines had already done much to set a pattern of dedicated service to the United States. This service had its beginning with the Continental Marines of the Revolutionary War. On 10 November 1775 the Continental Congress authorized the formation of two battalions of Marines, and,

although the battalions were not organized as such, Marine detachments were created as the needs of the new nation and the times dictated. Only four months after its birth, the Marines of the infant and lusty U. S. Marine Corps carried out the first in a long series of successful landing operations. Under the command of Captain Samuel Nicholas, 220 Marines, together with 50 sailors under a naval officer, landed and captured two British forts in the Bahamas. In the next 125 years U. S. Marines landed in every quarter of the globe. They fought side by side with the Navy and Army, and on occasion with foreign soldiers, sailors and Marines. "Time after time they have been called upon to quell revolutions, whether in an incipient or advanced stage, to secure redress for crimes committed upon United States citizens, to resent insults to the flag, to render assistance in times of great disaster, and even to put down mutinies aboard foreign men-of-war." Most often, however, the Marines landed, and when necessary fought to safeguard the lives of American citizens and protect the national interest of the United States. It is no wonder then that in the 19th Century the Marine Corps took for its official motto "Semper Fidelis" (Always Faithful). A Marine who knows the history of

his Corps may as easily read "Semper Fidelis" to mean always brave, capable and ready, as well as "Always Faithful."

IN THE PHILIPPINES

With the end of Spanish rule in the Philippines, Filipino insurrectionists under their fiery leader Aguinaldo grew bold enough to challenge the occupation of the island by the United States. Increasing numbers of insurrectionists rallied behind Aguinaldo, and by the second week of March 1899 Admiral George Dewey felt that they posed a serious threat to his naval base at Cavite. He called for a battalion of Marines.

Assembled at the New York Navy Yard, the battalion, 15 officers and 260 men shipped out on 13 April under the command of Colonel Percival C. Pope. The men carried Lee 6mm. rifles, the battalion was equipped with four 3-inch field pieces and two Colt machine guns.

The second battalion of the 1st Regiment¹ was born in much the same way; again a naval commander asked for Marines. On 26 July 1899 Rear Admiral John C. Watson, Commander-in-Chief, Asiatic Station, requested that additional Marines be provided for duty in Cavite. In less than a month the 2d Battalion of Marines, (16 officers, 362 enlisted) commanded by Major George

F. Elliott (10th Commandant of the Marine Corps, 1903-1910), was on its way to the Philippines. By the end of the year a third battalion (15 officers, 325 enlisted) under the command of Major Littleton W. T. Waller had arrived in the Philippines.² Thus was born the 1st Regiment of Marines. In the meantime, Lieutenant Colonel Elliott, recently promoted from Major, had assumed command of the 1st Regiment from Colonel Pope, who had been returned to the U. S. because of ill health.³

From 1899 to 1901 detachments of the 1st Regiment at Cavite were detailed as guards and garrisons at various points in the Philippines and took part in some of the operations conducted by the U. S. Army forces in the Philippine Insurrection. Throughout, the service of the Marines was characterized by high courage and discipline.

Early in October 1899 a detachment of the 1st Regiment under Captain Henry C. Haines supported U. S. Army units commanded by Brigadier General Frederick Grant in their advance from Bacoor to Imus. Marching over very broken ground covered with bamboo clumps or hedges, rice fields and small streams, the combined forces finally encountered and defeated an enemy force in the vicinity of Imus. In his report of the engagement, Captain



Haines states, "that General Grant and Colonel Daggett expressed their thanks for the assistance of the marines and their admiration for their behaviour during the skirmish."⁴

In the same month 356 Marines of the 1st Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Elliott won the battle of Novaleta. The attack on this strong insurgent position was conceived as a diversion for the Army movement against Cavite Viejo, but the Marine assault was carried out with will that belied its diversionary character.

The best description of the operation is in Lieutenant Colonel Elliott's own words:

"The country being so rough, I deemed it best to divide the command into two small battalions, which were commanded by Captain Haines on the left and Captain Fuller on the right.... firing being heard from the Army advance at about 10:15. Having received the message that the Army had crossed the Imus, the Petrel was signaled 'commence firing,' and she shelled our advance across the causeway. Lieut. A. E. Harding moved out first with 16 scouts, followed by the advance guard under Captain Davis 400 yards in the rear; following this company came Captain Fuller's battalion of two companies. The rear battalion, commanded by Captain Haines, was separated from the first by an interval of 24 paces. After passing over the causeway a dense thicket of thorn bushes was encountered, absolutely impassable except by a single narrow road, the ground being low and marshy and intersected by tide-water runs. When the scouts had advanced about a mile, sharp fire was opened on them--Captain Davis' company had pushed into the stream



in order to work to the front. I ordered First Lieutenant Butler's company (of Haines' battalion) to push up the road, following the advance of the scouts, as heavy fire had been opened upon them. Hardly had this road been well entered before a heavy fire came from the chaparral at a range of about 400 yards, on the left flank, and 2 men were wounded here. The men were opened out and hurried along on the run, in single file, in order that we might reach the open field some three-quarters of a mile ahead. Having arrived at the rice field, I ordered First Lieutenant Leonard (of Fullers' battalion) to debouch to the right and move forward, as a very heavy fire was coming from the front from a small fort with flanking intrenchments. This was done in fine style, but the companies following received a severe fire from the left flank, when the men dropped without orders, faced to the left, and opened a rattling fusillade, soon quelling this fire, and although they were formed flank to the principal fort, it was with difficulty that they were made to cease firing and move out of the road into the rice fields, deploying toward the works.

"Lieut. Leof M. Harding was conspicuous in his endeavor to compel deployment. Captain Haines coming up with his two companies stopped all annoyance from the left flank, then deployed his companies on that side of the road. Captain Fuller managed to get his line formed to the right of the road. Lieutenant Gilson's section of Captain Davis' company having broken through the chaparral, came up about this time. The ships could no longer fire in our front and a forward movement was made by rushes through rice fields from knee-deep to armpit deep in mud and water. When we arrived within 250 yards of the intrenchments, a slight dike was found on the left and a line of old rifle pits on the right. Here the men were gotten fairly well straightened out, but were unable to charge immediately, as they were absolutely "blown" from the fast pace and heavy ground.

"Four buglers sounded the charge repeatedly, the officers without exception calling on their men to respond, and



they finally broke forward in a dogged advance, without cheering, as they were breathless, and the enemy abandoned the entire length of the trenches, but kept up a short fire from nipa huts from the further side of the narrow, unfordable river which was directly in front of their works. The men of the right wing were the first in the works, as those on the left were blocked by lagoons and thorn bushes. The blockhouse was burned, as were all nipa huts from which firing was seen, and which were used by the garrison as barracks or shelter. A great deal of personal bravery among men and officers was shown, even up to reckless bravado, of which I highly disapproved, and I believe they will fight as well but with better judgement in the future."⁵

In December 1899, a force of 121 Marines of the 1st Regiment under command of Captain Herbert L. Draper, was ordered from Cavite to Olongapo to occupy the town and clear the surrounding country of insurgents and marauders. Among the officers of the detachment was 1st Lieutenant Logan Feland (who later commanded the 5th Marines in France during World War I, and the Marines in Nicaragua).⁶ The duties of the Marine force at Olongapo serve as an excellent and typical example of the varied duties and responsibilities assigned Marines in their long history of bringing law and order to troubled areas of the world. After less than two months at Olongapo, Captain Draper reported that:

"Many small scouting parties have been sent out from time to time to see that this district is clear of the enemy.

"A patrol system has been inaugurated in and about Olongapo.



This insures peace and tranquility to the town. No more robberies by ladrones have occurred since this was established, and the population of the town is increasing daily by the ingress of men from the insurgents and families from the mountains.

"To promote the general welfare and secure the regular routing of peaceful life for the Filipinos in Olongapo, I held an election for municipal officers on the 28th ultimo. This election was held with the usual Filipino ceremonies, secret ballot, and resulted in the election of men in whom I have some confidence for president, vice-president, and secretary of Olongapo, for alcalde of Benictican, and alcalde of Santa Rita. The officers were installed by me in their offices with due and appropriate ceremonies.

"After announcing the result of the election, I made a speech to the newly elected officials and electors to the effect that my government guaranteed to every man the fruit of his own toil, the rights of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and the right to worship God as he saw fit, and only demanded in return obedience to the laws.

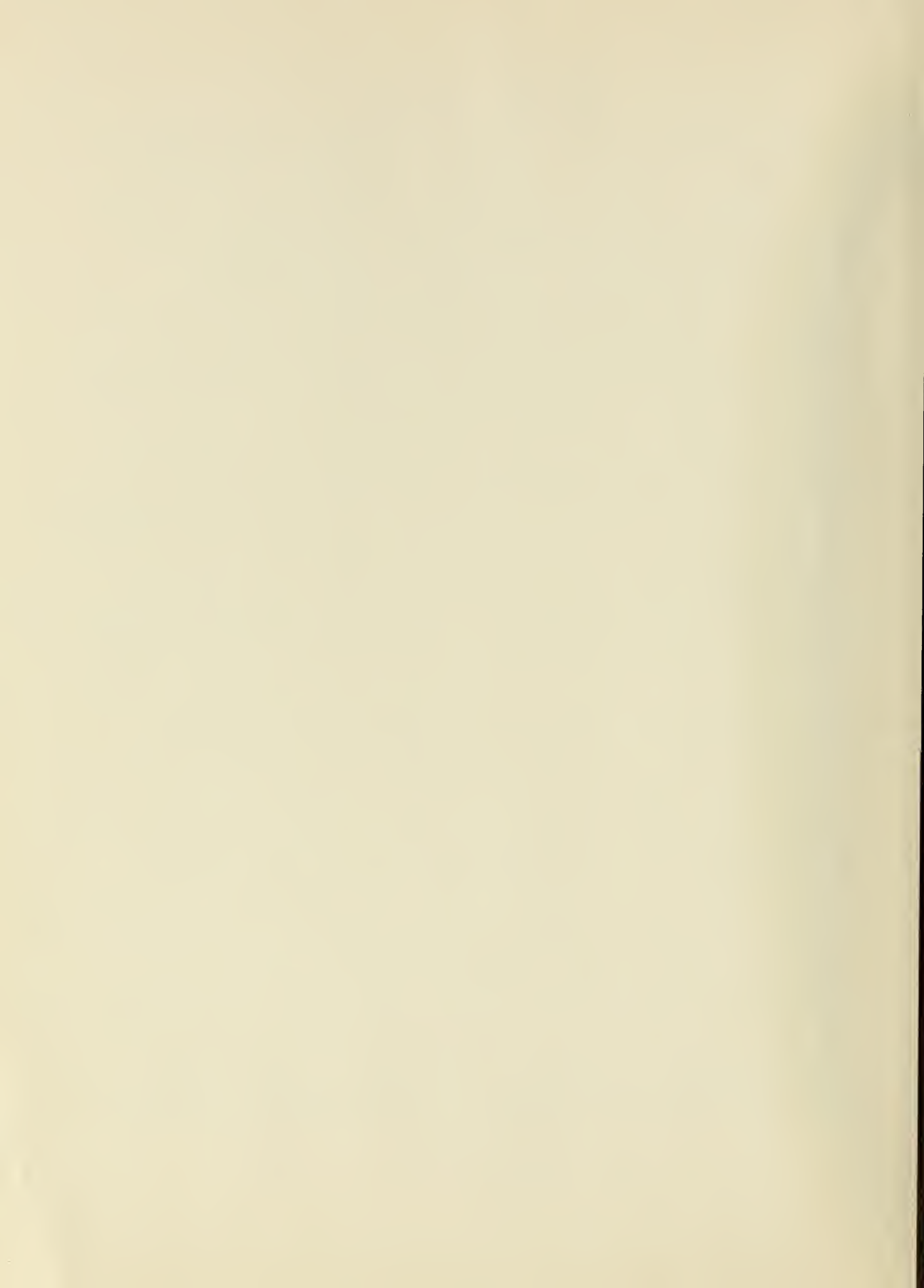
"I find that the new government works excellently. I have issued through them 204 ceduals. The municipal government having recommended, I have appointed 5 native policemen, uniformed in machetas and old full-dress helmets, so that they may be distinguished by the patrols at night.

"Since my arrival here forty families have moved into Olongapo, where no person lived before; government has been organized, the peaceful people are protected; an English school has been started, with Lieutenant Thorpe as teacher; rations have been issued to save from starvation some of the natives; medical attendance and medicines have been supplied when needed, and a constant scouting of the surrounding country maintained."⁶



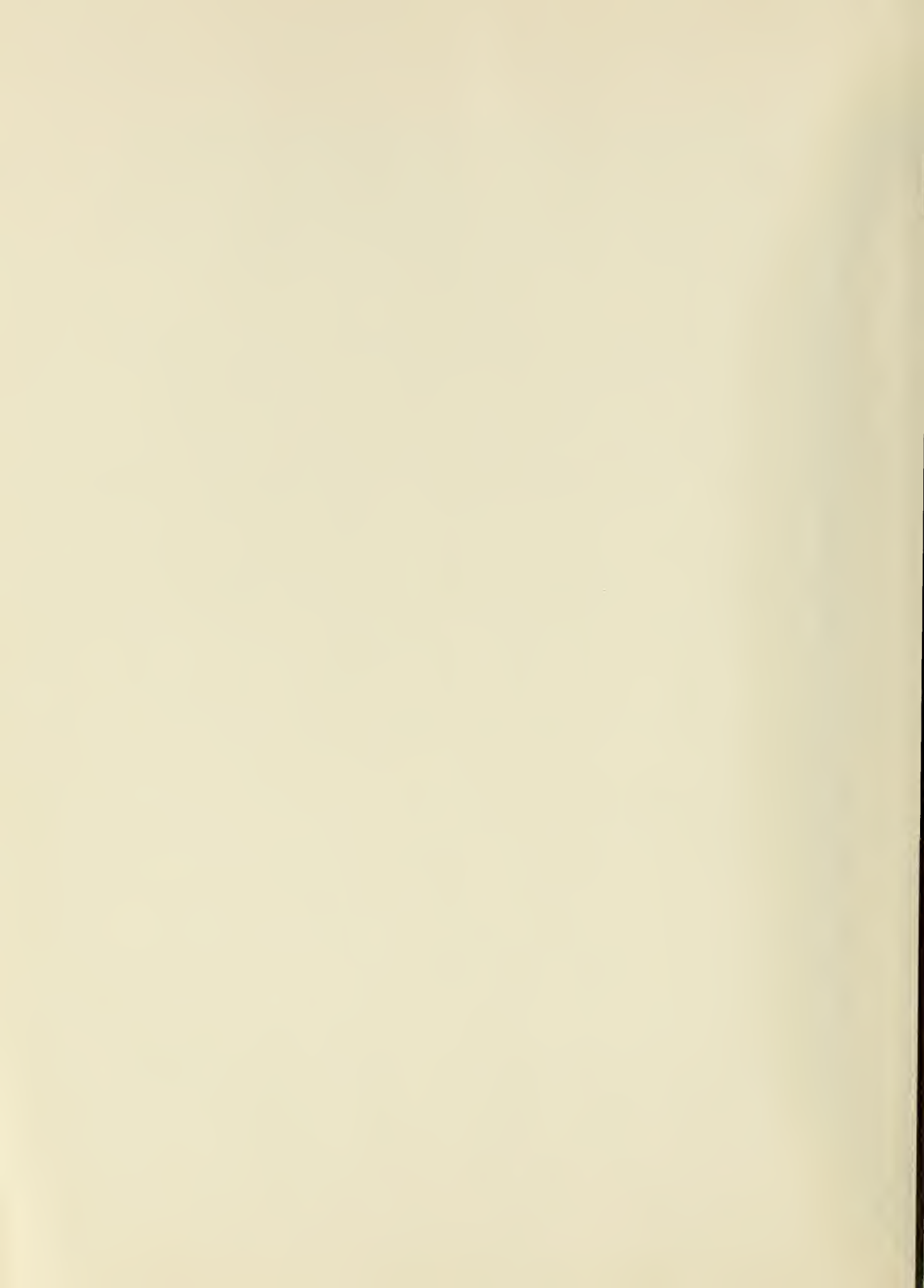
THE BOXER REBELLION

While the Marines were helping to restore law and order in the Philippines, in China, the Boxers, a violently antiforeign organization of milita-type units, rose in rebellion against foreign influence in China. Pledged to "exterminate the foreigners," the Boxers were equally hostile to Chinese Christians. In the first months of 1900 the Boxers destroyed several Christian villages, and massacred its inhabitants. They also murdered two English missionaries. They made no secret of their cruel intentions toward foreigners. By May, the foreigners in the Chinese capital of Peking were besieged by swarms of Boxers, and in desperate straits. Murder and pillage were daily occurrences. Small military units of assorted nationality, including two detachments of Marines and bluejackets, reached Peking before the Boxers encircled the city, but these reinforcements were barely enough to man thinly the defenses of the foreign legations. An international force of approximately 2000 men, including 112 American sailors and Marines, attempted to lift the siege, but was in the end itself besieged in an arsenal between Peking and Tientsin. Thoroughly alarmed, the American Government directed the commander in chief of the Asiatic naval station to render all possible aid to foreigners



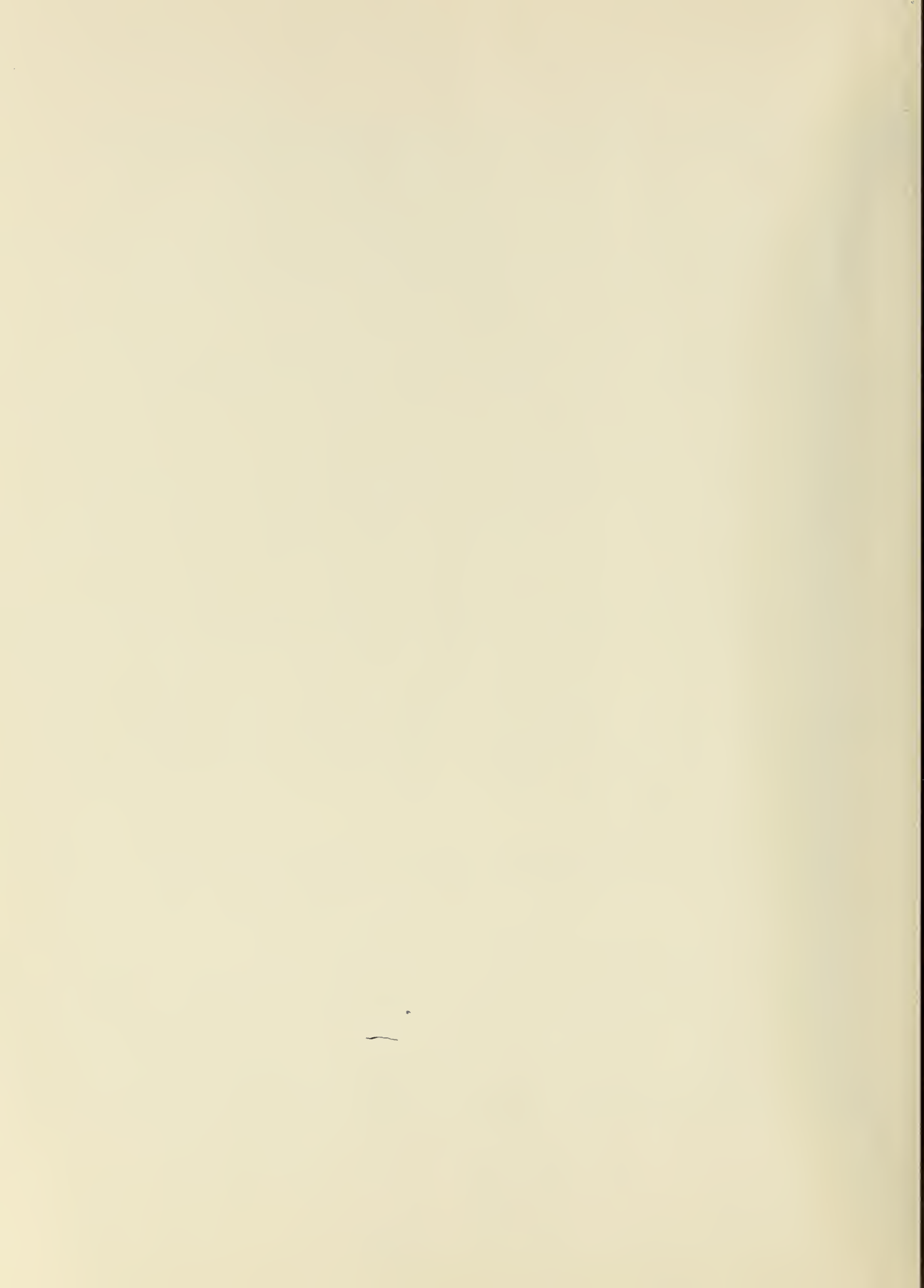
in Peking. As a result, the naval commander ordered the 1st Regiment of Marines from the Philippines to China where they were to march on Peking as part of another, but larger international force.⁷

The first contingent of Marines to arrive was a battalion of 1st Regiment commanded by Major Waller. On 19 June, immediately after debarking at Taku Bar, the battalion (8 officers and 123 enlisted) moved inland by rail to a point 12 miles from Tientsin where Major Waller joined his command with a Russian force of 400 men.⁸ Tientsin, too, had a besieged foreign population and the Russian Commander proposed to march on the city at once. Major Waller felt that the combined force of approximately 530 men was not large enough to penetrate the strong Boxer defenses before Tientsin. He advised waiting for the reinforcements which were already en route. Unfortunately, he was overruled in council, and on the next morning the combined force of American Marines and Russian infantrymen advanced on Tientsin. The column reached the outskirts of the city, but at this point came under intense fire from an entrenched force of 1500 to 2000 Boxers. "Major Waller deployed his force, and the flank fire becoming very heavy, turned to



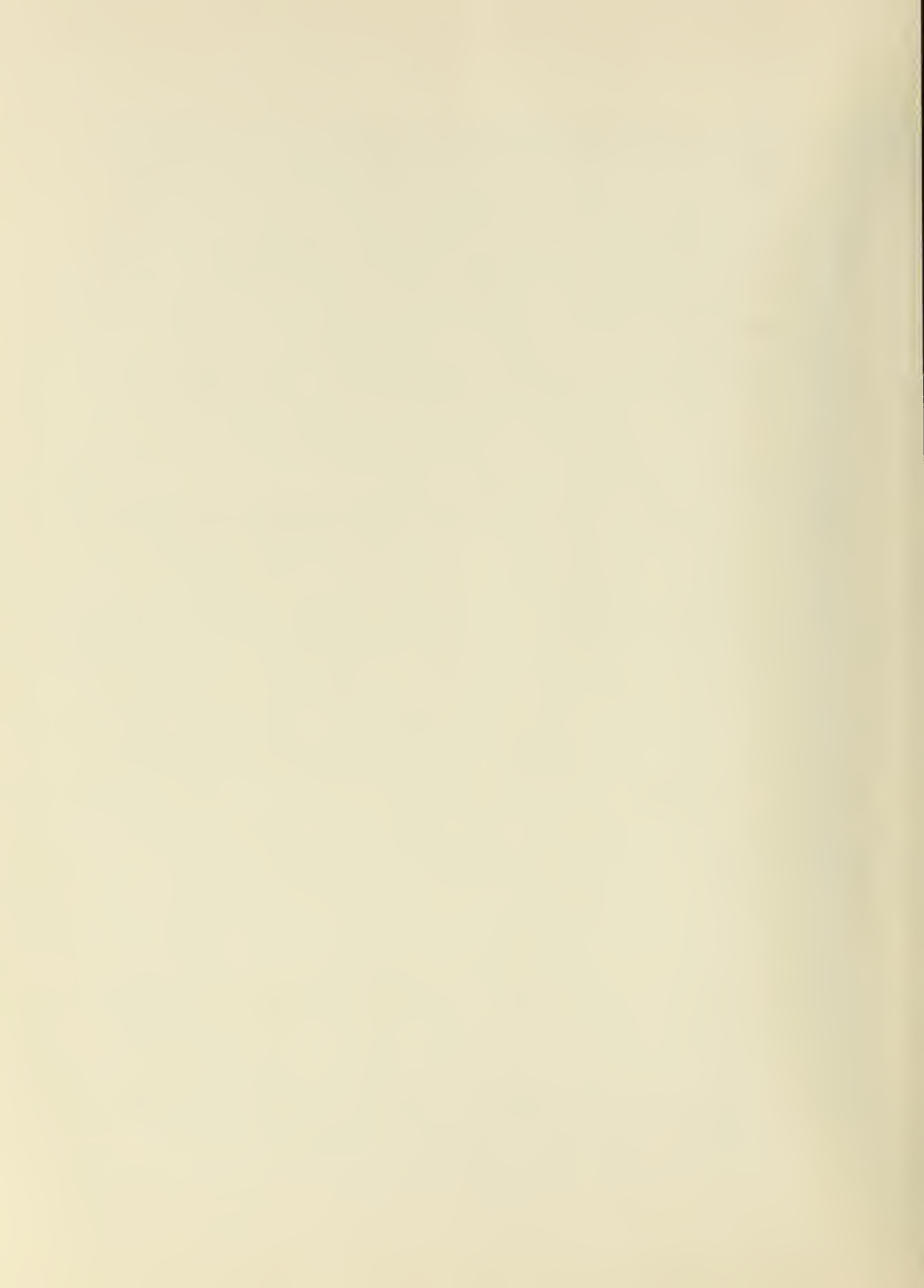
the left and rear confronting a flank movement, the marine line then having its front advanced and right flank refused. This position was held for some time by the Marines, until the Russian force began to fall back and form on their right at a distance of one-half mile, which movement again brought the fire of the enemy on the marines' left flank." Soon after, Major Waller... received notice that the Russians would retreat to a point about four miles beyond the bivouac of the night before, and he therefore began his retreat, moving by the right flank and keeping up a fight for four hours with the enemy who were following in force. In the withdrawal the Marines acted as the rear guard for the combined force. After a round-trip march of thirty miles and a running fight of five hours, Major Waller's battalion reached its bivouac of the previous night. Marine casualties were four killed and nine wounded.⁹

Hardly had the Marines and Russians returned to bivouac when reinforcements made their appearance at the camp. The new arrivals were approximately 1400 to 1500 troops of miscellaneous nationality. Major Waller promptly attached his battalion to the British contingent, and two days later the whole force, approximately 2000 men, attacked Tientsin. After a short but sharp



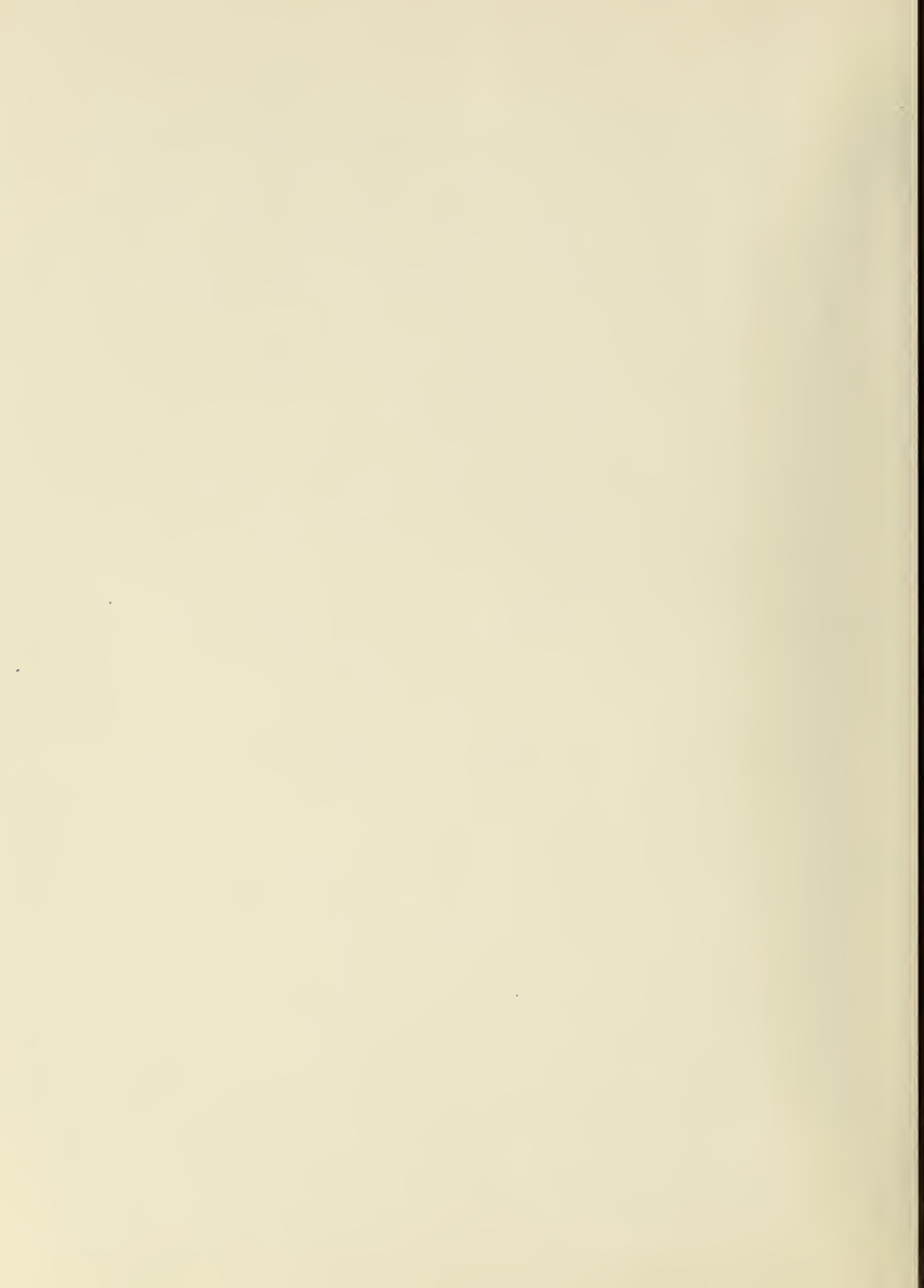
engagement the allied troops advanced into the city and relieved the beleaguered foreigners. Marine casualties were light, one killed and two wounded. Although the walled part of the city was still in the hands of the Boxers, the combined force waited only for daybreak the next morning before pushing on to the relief of allied force besieged in the arsenal eight miles beyond Tientsin. This time Boxers offered no resistance, and the relief was accomplished without incident.¹⁰

Since the combined force was not strong enough to assault the Chinese capital city, Peking, it returned to Tientsin to await additional reinforcements. Back in Tientsin, the Russians again assailed the strong Boxer position from which the Czar's troops and the Marine battalion had been driven back almost a week earlier. Again they failed. But, undaunted, they planned a new attack. This time, however, they were reinforced by 42 of Major Waller's Marines and a British detachment. Major Waller reported that "This force was about 1800 strong, and succeeded in driving the enemy from the parapets out of their fortifications and in full flight. It was developed that the enemy had about 7000 men at this point. Our men charged over the parapet with a British company, being the first in in this part of the fight. Our loss here was one wounded..."¹¹



Obviously proud of his command, Major Waller also reported that "Our men have marched 97 miles in the five days, fighting all the way. They have lived on about one meal a day for about six days, but have been cheerful and willing always. They have gained the praise from all present, and have earned my love and confidence. They are like Falstaff's army in appearance, but with brave hearts and bright weapons." ¹²

Although the combined force held the foreign quarter of Tientsin, the ancient walled part of the city was still in the hands of the Boxers. Lacking the strength to storm the native city successfully, the combined force carried on an intermittent warfare with the Boxers and waited for additional reinforcements. It did not have to wait long. On 11 July, 318 officers and men of the 1st Regiment, now commanded by Colonel Robert L. Meade, and the 9th Infantry, USA, arrived in Taku and immediately moved to Tientsin.¹³ At roughly the same time additional allied reinforcements also reached the city. Colonel Meade reported that, upon his arrival in Tientsin, he found "Major Waller and his force quartered in the European concession in houses which were nightly under shell fire of the enemy. Small bodies of the enemy also controlled the streets with rifle fire at night..."¹⁴



At a conference held on 12 July, the allied forces decided to attack the walled city at daybreak the next morning. Since the 9th Infantry units in Tientsin had been placed under the command of Colonel Meade, the commander of the 1st Regiment was asked to furnish 1000 Marines and infantrymen for the assault. Colonel Meade designated 346 Marines and 673 men of the 9th Infantry to make up this force. The next morning the American force advanced to the attack brigaded with the Welsh Fusiliers and a British naval detachment, all under the command of Brigadier General Dorward of the British Army.¹⁵

Colonel Meade's description of the action in which the Marines of the 1st Regiment participated on 13 July provides an excellent window from which to view the first day's fighting in the 1st Regiment's sector.

"At about 6.30 a.m. I received orders from the British general to support the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in an attack on the extreme left, and we crossed the wall in skirmish line, having an extensive swamp to cross. The country was a flat, level one, with grave mounds and dikes and ditches in great numbers; and these already dug trenches were a very considerable help to us, as in such an open, fire-swept plain we would have had difficulty in advancing, and would have been compelled, with only the bayonet, to throw up hasty intrenchments. The fire of the Chinese, both in artillery and infantry, was fearfully accurate,...



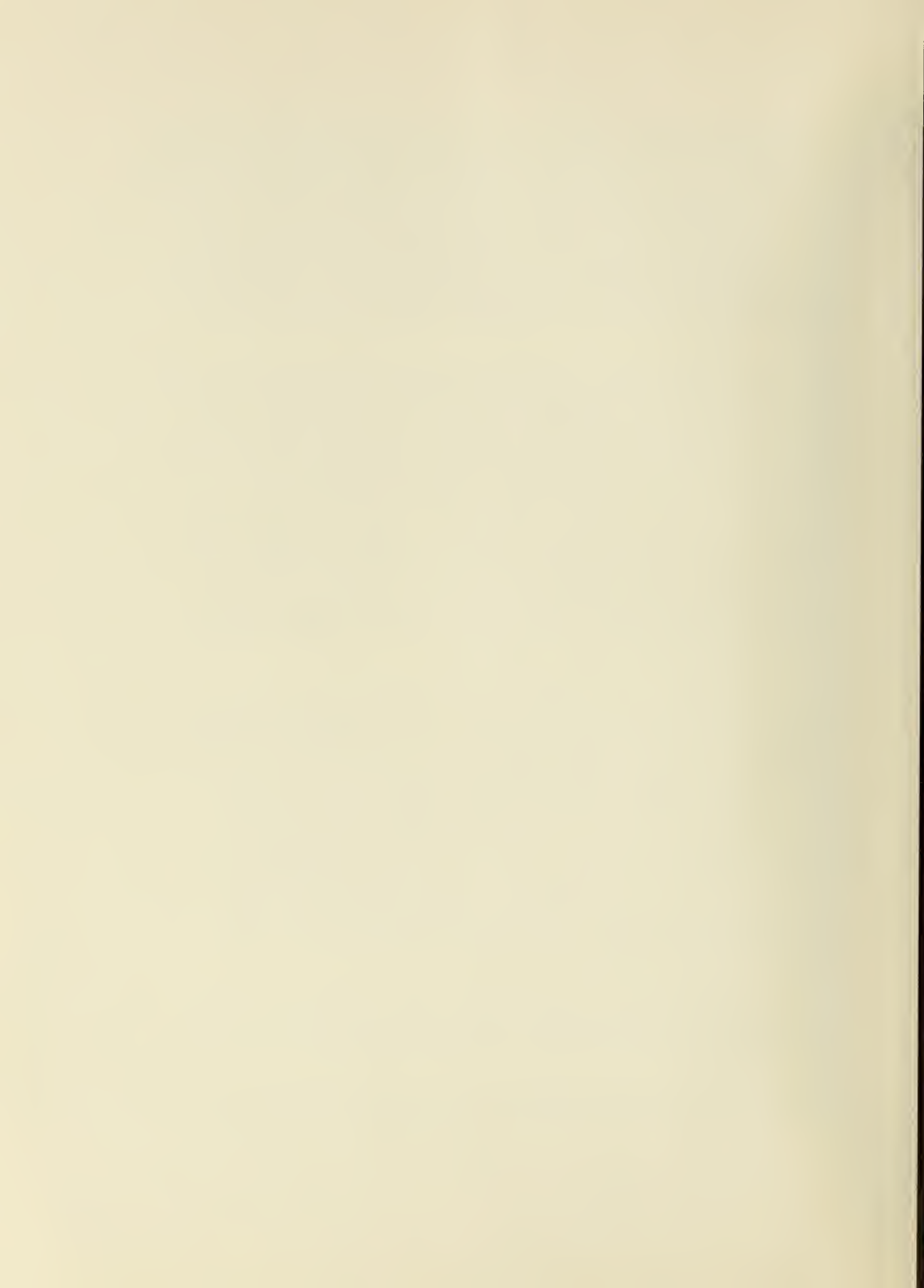
"We advanced by rushes to a line of trenches about 800 yards from the enemy...We reached the advanced position about 8 a.m. I took 180 rounds per man with me--100 rounds in the belts and 80 in the haversacks. This is not sufficient for an all-day fight, and as it grew toward night I began to be apprehensive of being left in an advanced position in a fight where no prisoners were taken on either side with only the bayonet to fight with.

"On the firing line the action was especially hot and the enemy's fire especially rapid and accurate, and about 8.30 a.m. the enemy appeared in large numbers upon our left and among the grave mounds of the field in which we were, with the evident intention of flanking us. I made a turning movement to the left and rear, and we drove them away. Later in the day, about 2 p.m., they again made a flanking effort, but at this time the infantry support of the artillery company was on the mud wall of the city and aided us by a cross fire...The effort of the enemy proved a failure, and we drove them in.

"We remained in the trenches until about 8 p.m., when we received an order from the brigadier-general commanding to withdraw, which was probably the most difficult action of the day, since the enemy had so well covered our position that their shots struck the crests of the trenches and threw dirt in our faces many being hit. I ordered the withdrawal in small parties of 8 or 10 men, to rush from mound to mound or trench to trench. I had previously sent the wounded to the rear under particularly unfortunate circumstances. I had also to send one dead officer to the rear.

"The withdrawal was successful, only one man being hit, and we were in safety under the mud wall near the south gate."¹⁶

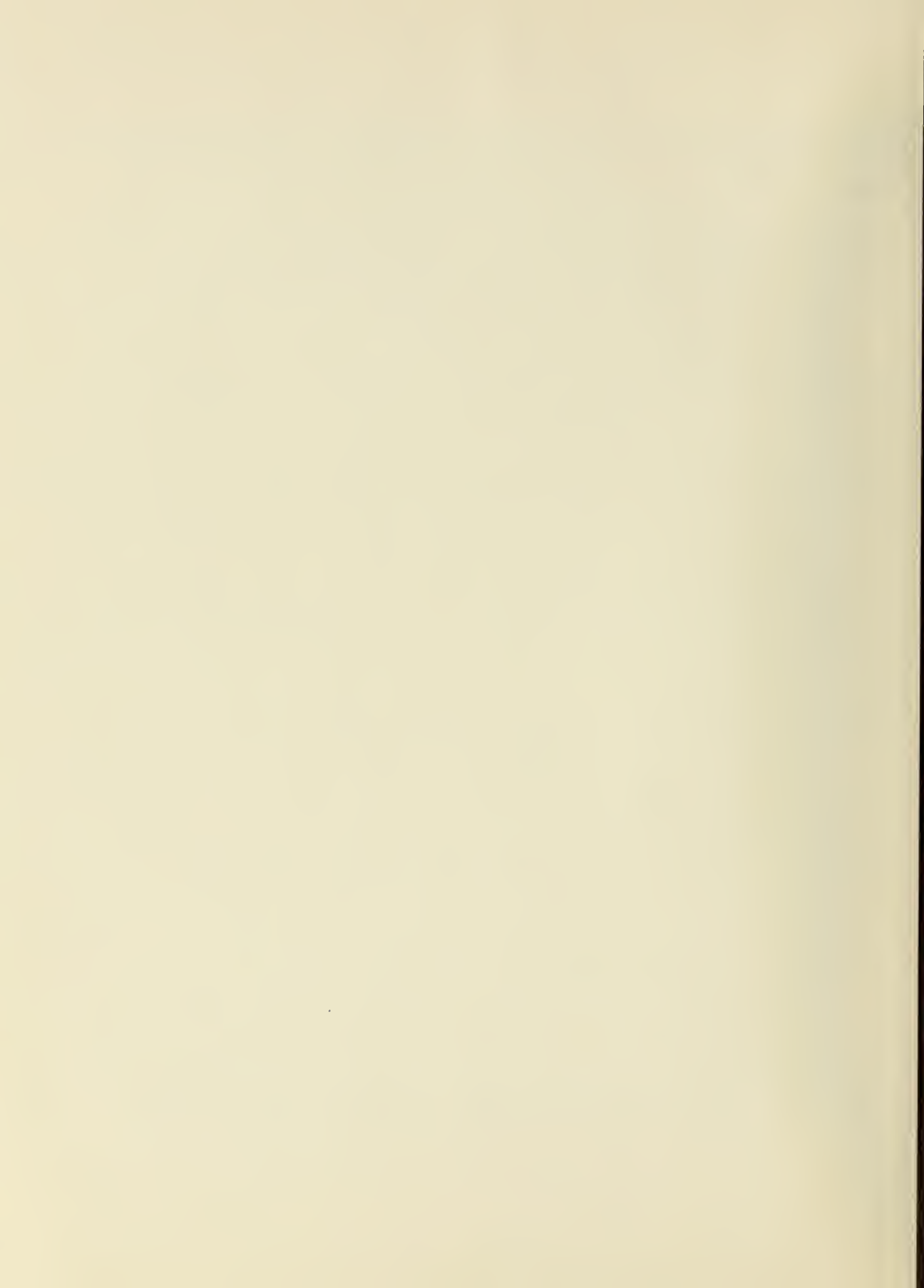
According to Colonel Meade, the Marines fought all day with



only one small meal "which each man carried in his own haversack." That night, however, General Dorward saw to it that food and "other necessaries" were provided to the Marines, and the next morning Colonel Meade's men were ready to renew the assault.

The south gate was blown at daybreak, and the Marines advanced through the gate and into the streets of the walled city. The attacks in the other sectors were equally successful, and the whole of Tientsin was soon firmly in the hands of the Allies.¹⁷ All the Marine casualties, one officer and four enlisted killed, and four officers and twenty enlisted wounded, were sustained in the vigorous action of the 13th. The Marine officer killed was Captain Austin R. Davis, who was struck in an advanced position at the side of Colonel Meade. Colonel E. H. Liscum, the commander of the 9th Infantry was also killed in this action. Included among the Marine officers wounded was 1st Lieutenant Smedley D. Butler, who was seriously wounded attempting to rescue a wounded Marine lying in the open. Lieutenant Butler later won two Medals of Honor, and rose to the rank of Major General.

Shortly after the capture of Tientsin, Colonel Meade relinquished command of the 1st Regiment to Major Waller, who, in turn, was soon superseded by Major William P. Biddle, newly



arrived in China. Major Biddle took over the reins just as the 1st Regiment was preparing to march to the relief of Peking as part of the recently re-augmented allied force. Substantial U. S. Army reinforcements had arrived in July, accompanied by Major General Adna R. Chaffee, USA, and all American forces, including the 1st Regiment, were placed under his command. The allied force started its advance toward Peking on 4 August in three columns, American, Russo-French, and British. Naturally, the Marines formed part of the American column.

Only minor resistance was encountered on the 80-mile march to the Chinese capital. But, at Yangtsun on 6 August, the 1st Regiment did participate in a noteworthy skirmish.

Major Biddle's report of the engagement follows:

"The Marines acted as a support to Riley's battery throughout the day. During the early advance we came under the fire of both small arms and artillery. At one stage of the fight the enemy's cavalry was discovered on our right front and were put to rout by several well-directed volleys. We then advanced on a village in line of skirmishers, throwing out scouts to the front, taking said village with little or no opposition and without loss. After a short rest we advanced and drove the enemy out of another village. Owing to frequent changes of direction, flank movements, and excessive heat many of the men were overcome.

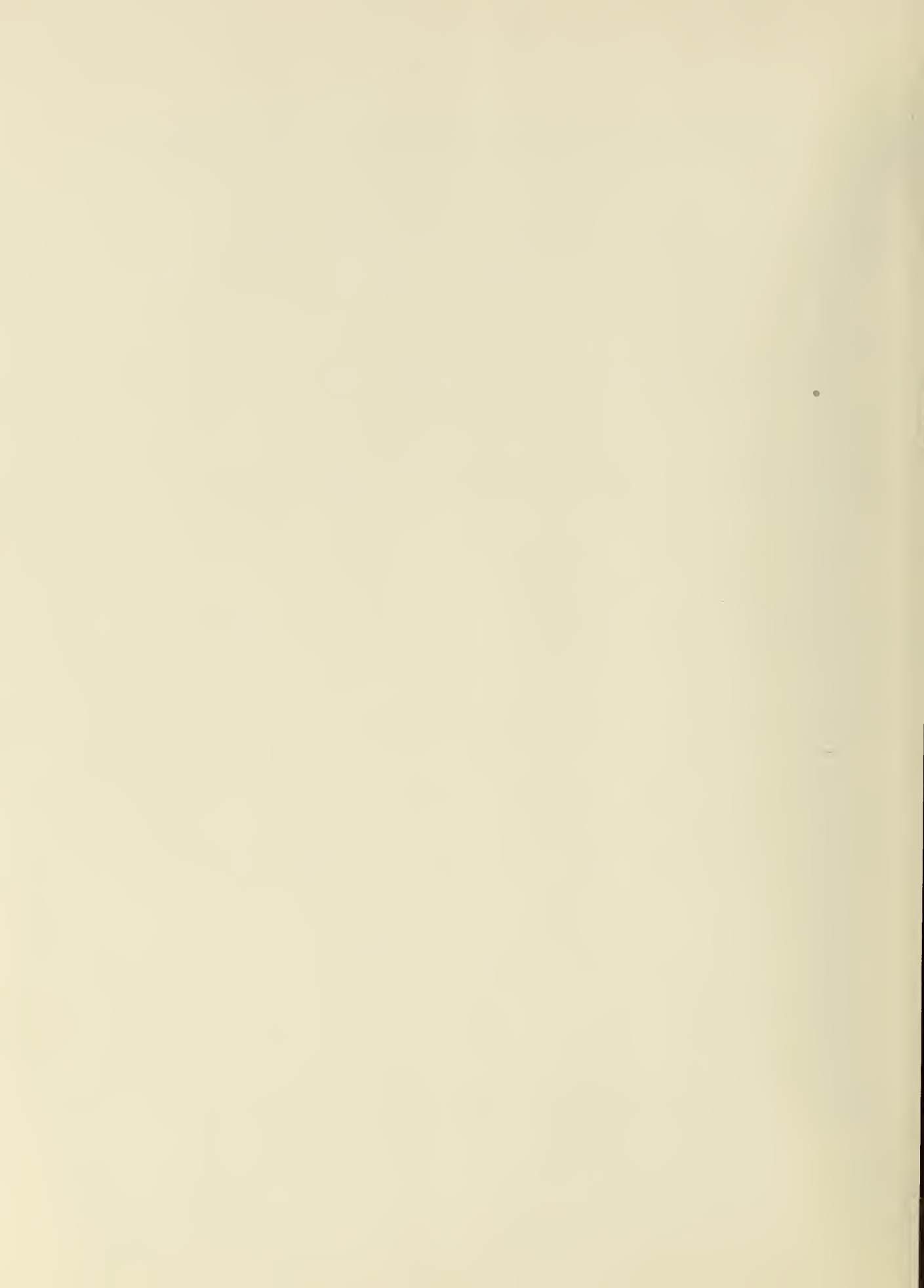
"In this engagement Corporal Brophy died from the heat and Private Pruitt was wounded."¹⁹



The heat was indeed the worst enemy of the allied force in this stage of the operation. The losses imposed on the advancing columns by the Boxers were insignificant compared to the toll exacted by hot sun. In citing the conduct of his men in the engagement at Yangtsun, Captain F. J. Moses, commanding the 2d Battalion, reported that at one point "40 per cent of them became overcome by the heat." Nevertheless, "officers and men showed...commendable fortitude and spirit, many of them just dragging themselves along in order to be in the attack..."²⁰

When the force reached Matow, about two thirds of the way to Peking, Major Biddle received the order to leave behind all men incapable of marching further, only four of the approximately 500 Marines of the 1st Regiment fell out.²¹

Pushing on from Yangtsun, the relief expedition reached Peking on 14 August, and immediately launched an attack against the outer wall of the city. The ever-present Lieutenant Butler was here wounded a second time while leading his company onto the wall. During the day the Marines engaged in fire fights with the Boxers at the north gate to the city, and protected the artillery. The Marines' position was close by the legation quarter. In the afternoon the siege was lifted, and long-



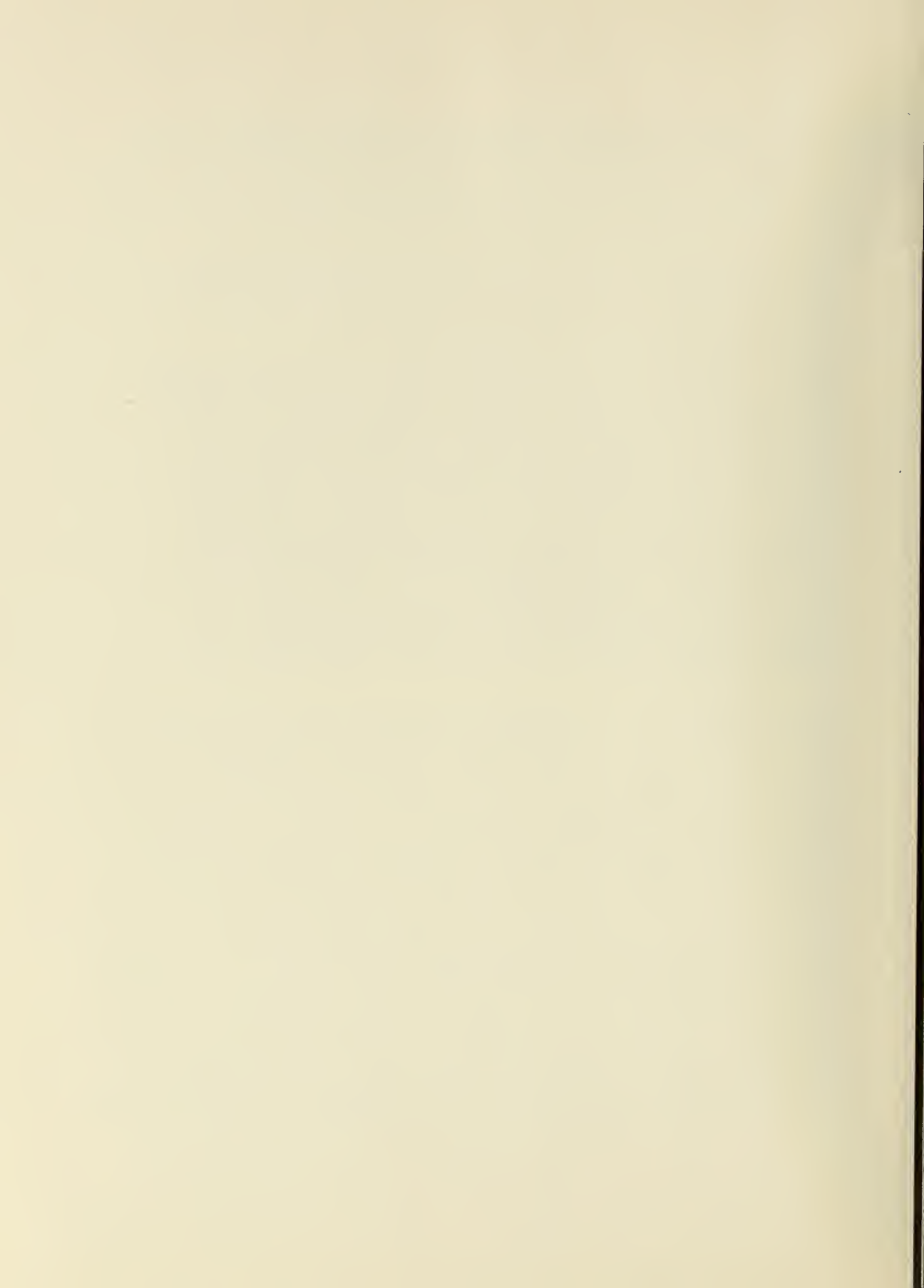
suffering foreign residents passed through the Marines' lines. That night the Marines bivouacked under the walls of the Tartar City.²²

The next day, 15 August, saw the capture of the Imperial City. Subsequently, Major Biddle stated that:

"On the morning of the 15th the advance was made against the Imperial City with the marines leading. We took position on the Chien-men gate and cleared away the barricades, in order that the artillery might take position. Two companies of the first battalion were posted in the second story of the pagoda, while the second battalion took position along the wall, both battalions firing volleys at ranges of 900 yards at the first gate of the Imperial City, where the enemy were in force. During this period we were under heavy small arms fire and some artillery fire. The enemy, after a stubborn resistance, were driven from their position."²³

Major Waller, in his report of the part played by the 1st Battalion on 15 August, stated that during the engagement he "was ordered by the commanding general to capture a number of flags mounted on enemy's position at the west gate." Before the mission could be executed, the Boxers opened an intense fire from the next gate, and the order was revoked. But General Chaffee got his flags anyway. Later in the day, the Marines captured the flags and presented them to the Army commander.²⁴

As in the battle of Tientsin, the attacks of all the allied

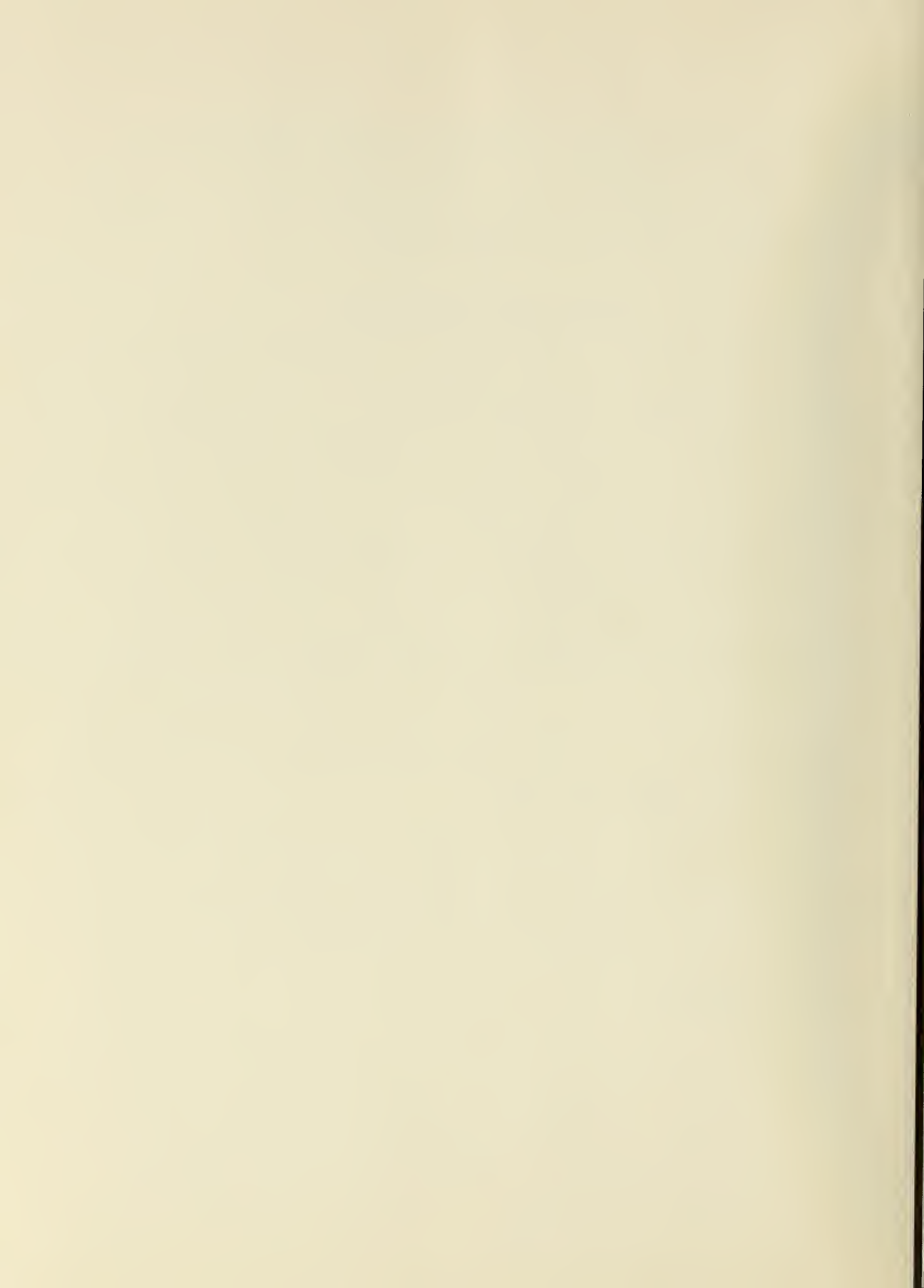


forces were successful, and although sporadic fighting in the vicinity of Peking continued for several weeks, the city itself remained firmly in the hands of the allies.

BACK IN THE PHILIPPINES

In September 1900, peace having been restored in China, the 1st Regiment returned to the Philippines. With the regiment's arrival in Cavite, all Marine units in the Philippines were organized into a provisional brigade of two regiments, the 1st and 2d. Each regiment contained two battalions.²⁵ The 1st Regiment was then transferred to Olongapo. The Marines established garrisons and outposts on Cavite Peninsula and the area around Subic Bay where they carried out the functions of a military government, and made excellent progress in ridding the neighborhood of marauding bands.

In this period, the varied duties of Marine officers of the regiment included service as port captains, district commanders, custom inspectors, collectors of internal revenue, and provost judges and marshals.



In 1900 and 1901, the areas occupied by Marine units in the Philippines remained comparatively free of insurrection. Far to the southeast, however, the insurgents of Samar were still un-pacified. On 28 September 1901, the soldiers of Company C, Ninth Infantry, stationed at Balangiga, were massacred by the insurrectos. This tragedy led Brigadier General Jacob M. Smith, U.S.A., who was in command of the military district which included the island of Samar, to call for reinforcements. Destiny beckoned to the Marines.

On 20 October 1901, a battalion of Marines (15 officers and 300 enlisted), commanded by Major Waller was detailed for duty in Samar. Two days later the battalion, composed of Companies C, D, and H of the 1st Regiment and Company F of the 2d Regiment, departed Cavite. At the end of the month, the Marines arrived in Basey, Samar, where Major Waller disembarked his headquarters and two companies, and relieved units of the 9th Infantry. The remainder of the battalion then proceeded to Balangiga, and relieved the 17th Infantry. Operations against the insurgents were begun at once. Small expeditions were sent out almost daily to clear the country of General Vicente Lukbam's guerrillas, who usually operated in small, roving bands. On 5 November, Major Waller took



a detachment to the Sohoton River and drove the guerrillas from their trenches there; two Marines were killed. A number of small expeditions were sent up the Cadacan River; several of these parties were fired on, but the skirmishes were slight. In an engagement, 8 November, at Iba, several insurgents were killed or captured. An expedition under Captain Porter, sent out to scout in the vicinity of Balangiga, killed one insurgent and captured seven, and found many relics of the massacred men of the Ninth Infantry.

As a result of the continual harassing by the Marines along the southern coast of Samar, the insurgents fell back from that region and occupied their fortified defenses on the Sohoton Cliffs, along the Sohoton River. About the middle of November, three columns of Marines were sent into the Sohoton region to attack this reportedly impregnable stronghold.

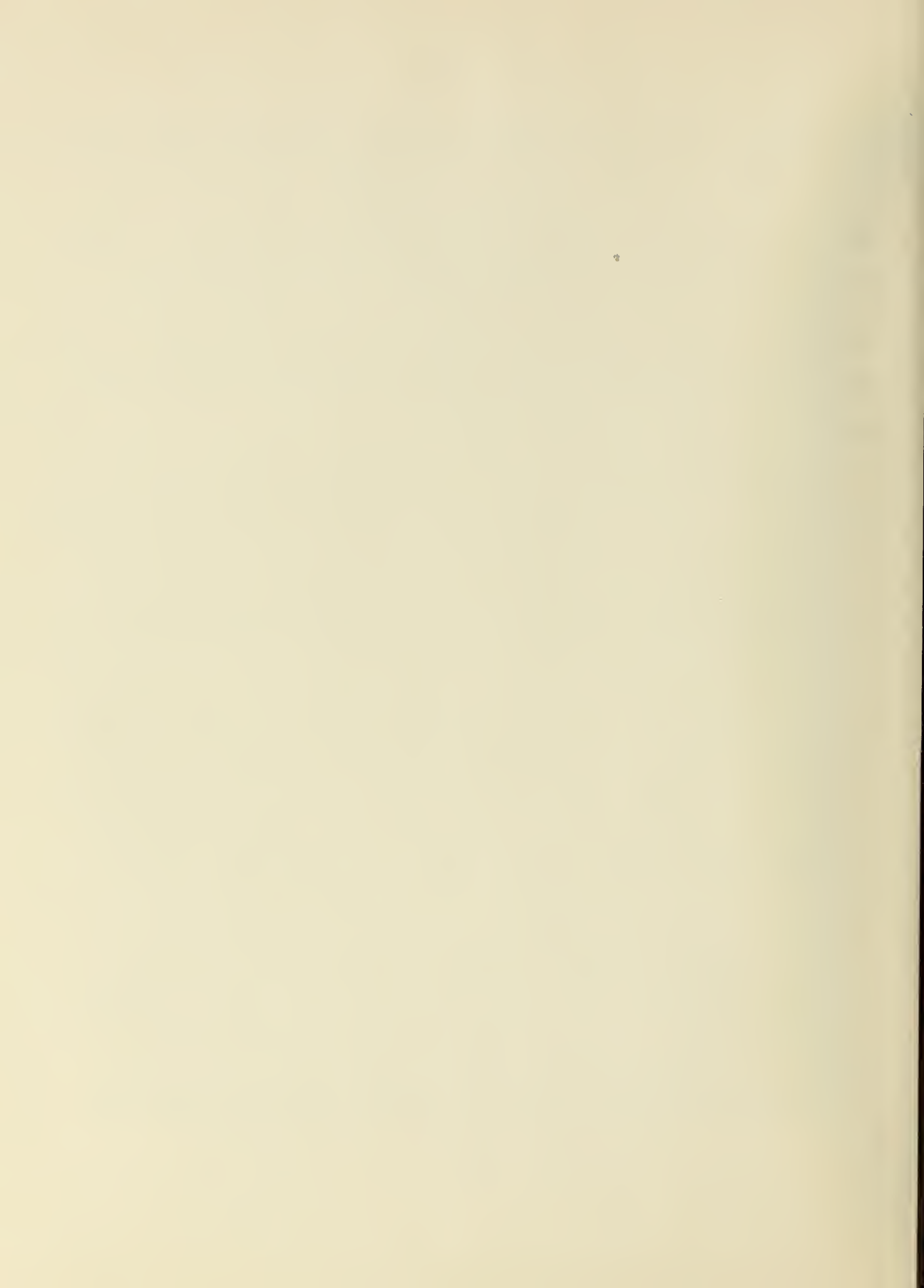
As day by day the Marines made inroads on the strength, efficiency, and freedom of movement of the rebellious Moros, the insurgents gradually fell back from the southern coast of Samar. By November, they had retreated to their final hold-out, the heavily fortified defenses on the Sohoton cliffs flanking the Sohoton River. The insurgents considered their position impregnable, and with



good reason. "In order to reach the enemy's position, the troops had to climb the cliffs, which rise sheer from the river to the height of about 200 feet and are honeycombed with caves, to which access is had by means of bamboo ladders, and also by narrow ledges with bamboo hand rails. Tons of rock were suspended in cages, held in position by vines, and in readiness to be precipitated upon people and boats below."

Undaunted by reports of this formidable fortress, Major Waller made plans for a three-pronged assault on the Sohoton cliffs. He decided to split his force into three columns. Two columns, led by Captain Porter and "Hiking Hiram" Bearss, were to march overland, join together en route, and advance to the vicinity of the cliffs where they were to be joined by the third column, under Major Waller, for a combined attack against the enemy stronghold. The two land columns moved out on 15 November and came together as planned the next day. Even as the two columns met, Major Waller was moving up the river to reunite his command for the assault. However, through "a misunderstanding the main column halted and camped for the night under the impression that it was impossible to move the boats except to destruction."

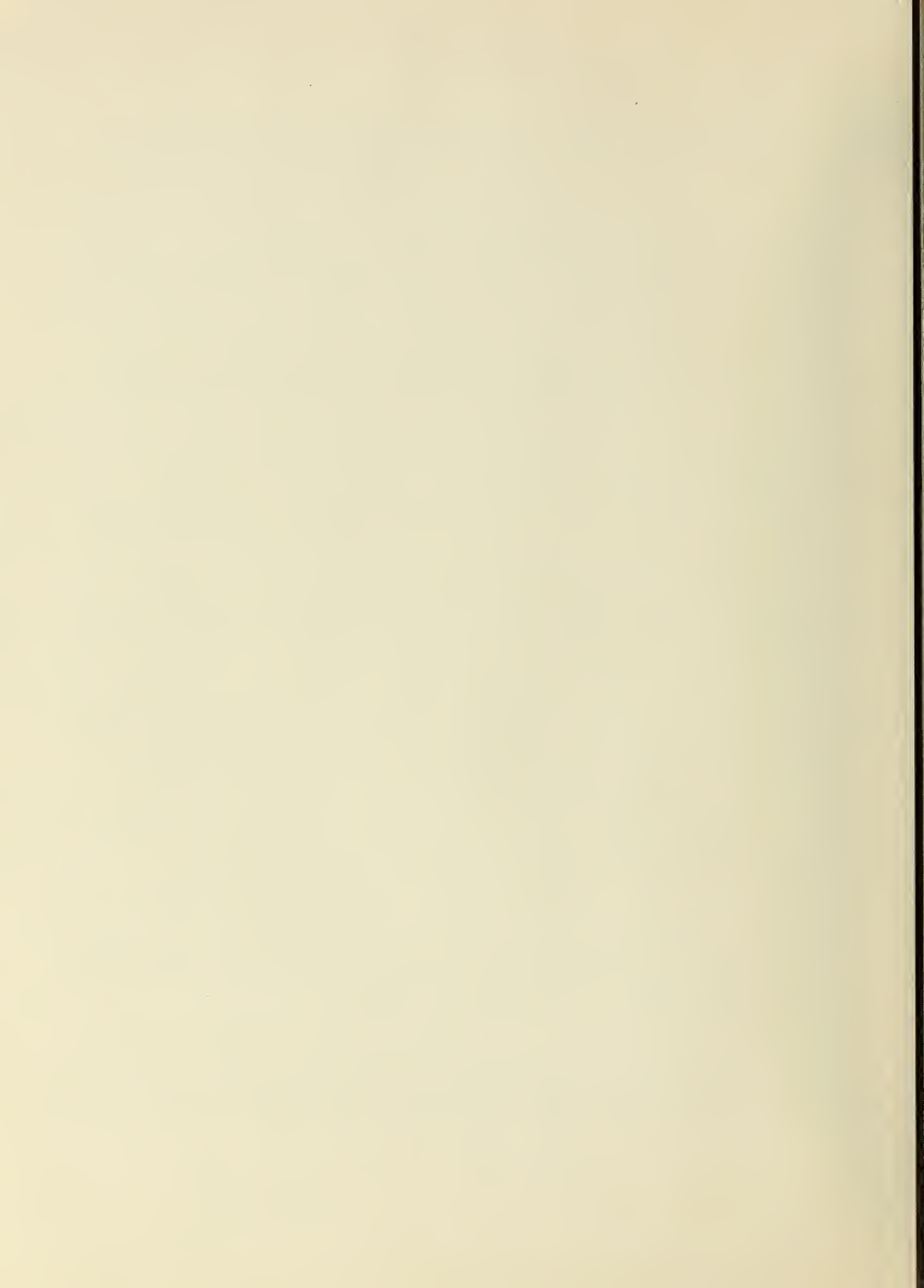
Moving out the next morning the shore column came upon the



main trail into the enemy's outlying position, across the river from the Sohoton cliffs. And before long they found a number of bamboo guns emplaced to defend the trail. Fortunately, the guns were deserted, but from one of the guns trailed a burning fuse. Without hesitation, Acting Corporal Harry Glenn leaped forward and tore out the fuse. Advancing rapidly, the Marines charged into the enemy camp only to find that the insurgents had fled, leaving their fires still burning and their food cooking.

"The column pushed on; as the point reached the next higher cliff, it discovered two other camps on the opposite side of the river about 150 yards away. The enemy was busily preparing food or cutting bamboos in each camp and were perfectly unaware of impending danger. Porter carefully closed up his column, brought up a Colt automatic gun which was being transported by native carriers, and placed it and his men in position for a telling blow upon the enemy's camps. After about ten minutes of preparation and upon Porter's signal every available weapon opened fire. The Moros were completely surprised and routed, and before they could flee thirty of them were killed."

Porter now led his Marines down to the left bank of the river, and ferried his command across in two dugout canoes and a



raft. The Marines were finally confronting the Moros' place of "final retreat," -- sheer cliffs, the crest of which contained the core of the enemy's defense.

The Marines scaled the cliffs, drove the insurgents from their positions and destroyed their camps. Major Waller's detachment, coming up the river in boats, did not arrive in time for the attack, which probably saved it from disaster; instant destruction would have undoubtedly been the fate of the boats had they undertaken the ascent of the river before the shore column had dislodged the insurgents.

Further pursuit of the enemy at this time was abandoned for rations were exhausted and the men were bone-weary with fatigue. The volcanic stone had cut the men's shoes to pieces, many of them were barefooted, and all had bruised or torn feet. The men had overcome incredible difficulties and dangers in their heroic march. The positions which they had destroyed must have taken several years to prepare. Reports from prisoners said they had been there years working on the defenses. Never before had white troops penetrated to these positions.

In December 1901, Major Waller with a party, composed largely of men of the 1st Marines, undertook the historic march across



Samar. This march was carried out under such incredible difficulties but with such courage and determination that down to the present day when Marines speak of hardships on the march, they frequently use Samar as the standard of comparison. The idea of the march was originated by General Smith, who more than once expressed his desire that the Marines select a route across Samar for the laying of a telephone line to connect the east and west coasts.

Major Waller decided he would start his march from Lanang, work up the Lanang River as far as possible, and then strike out across country to the vicinity of the Sohoton cliffs, so recently captured by the Marines. Upon his arrival at the jumping-off-place, the army commander in Lanang advised against the expedition, but Major Waller was not swayed. "Remembering," said Major Waller in a subsequent report, "the General's...several talks on the subject and his evident desire to know the terrain and run wires across, coupled with my own desire for some further knowledge of the people and the nature of this heretofore impenetrable country. I decided to make the trial with 50 men and the necessary carriers."

The detachment moved out of Lanang on the morning of 28 December 1901. The start was made in boats, but at Lagitao the numerous



rapids forced the Marines to leave their boats behind. They continued the movement on foot. One of the most trying features of the march was the necessity for crossing and recrossing the swollen river many times, which kept the men's clothing wet continually. On 30 December, it was necessary to reduce the rations, and the next day the rations had to be cut down to one half and the number of meals per day to two. The march was continued across the rugged mountains on 1 and 2 January. On 3 January, the rapidly vanishing food supply and the serious condition of the troops made the situation very critical. The men were becoming ill, their clothing were in rags, their feet were swollen and bleeding, and the terrain was almost impassable. After a conference with his officers, Major Waller decided to take Lieutenant Halford and thirteen of the men who were in the best condition and push forward as rapidly as possible and send back a relief party for the main column, which was placed under the command of Captain Porter, with instructions to proceed slowly and follow Major Waller's trail. The advance column was afterwards joined by Captain Bearss and a corporal, the former carrying a message from Captain Porter. A message was sent back to Captain Porter, directing him to follow the advanced column



to a clearing where a quantity of sweet potatoes, bananas and young coconut palms had been found. Here Waller had decided to rest until his men were in condition to continue the march.

This message did not reach Porter, however, as the native by whom it was sent returned two days later, stating that there were so many insurrectos about that he was afraid to proceed.

On 4 January, Major Waller's party rushed a shack and captured five natives, among whom were a man and a boy who stated that they knew the way to Basey. After crossing the Sohoton River, the famous Spanish trail leading from the Sohoton caves to the Suribao River was discovered and followed. The party crossed the Loog River and proceeded through the valley to Banglay, on the Cadacan River. Near this point the party came upon the camp which Captain Dunlap had established to await their arrival. Major Waller's party went aboard Captain Dunlap's cutter and started for Basey, where they arrived on 6 January 1902.

Concerning the condition of the men of his party, Major Waller says: "Most of them had no shoes. Cut, torn, bruised and dilapidated, they had marched without murmur for twenty-nine days."

Immediately after the arrival of the detachment at Basey,



a relief party was sent back to locate Captain Porter's party. The following day Major Waller joined this relief party, and remained out nine days searching for signs of Captain Porter without success. The floods were terrific and several of the former camp sites were many feet under water. The members of the relief party began to break down, due to the many hardships and the lack of food, and the party had to return to Basey. Upon returning to Basey, Major Waller was taken sick with fever.

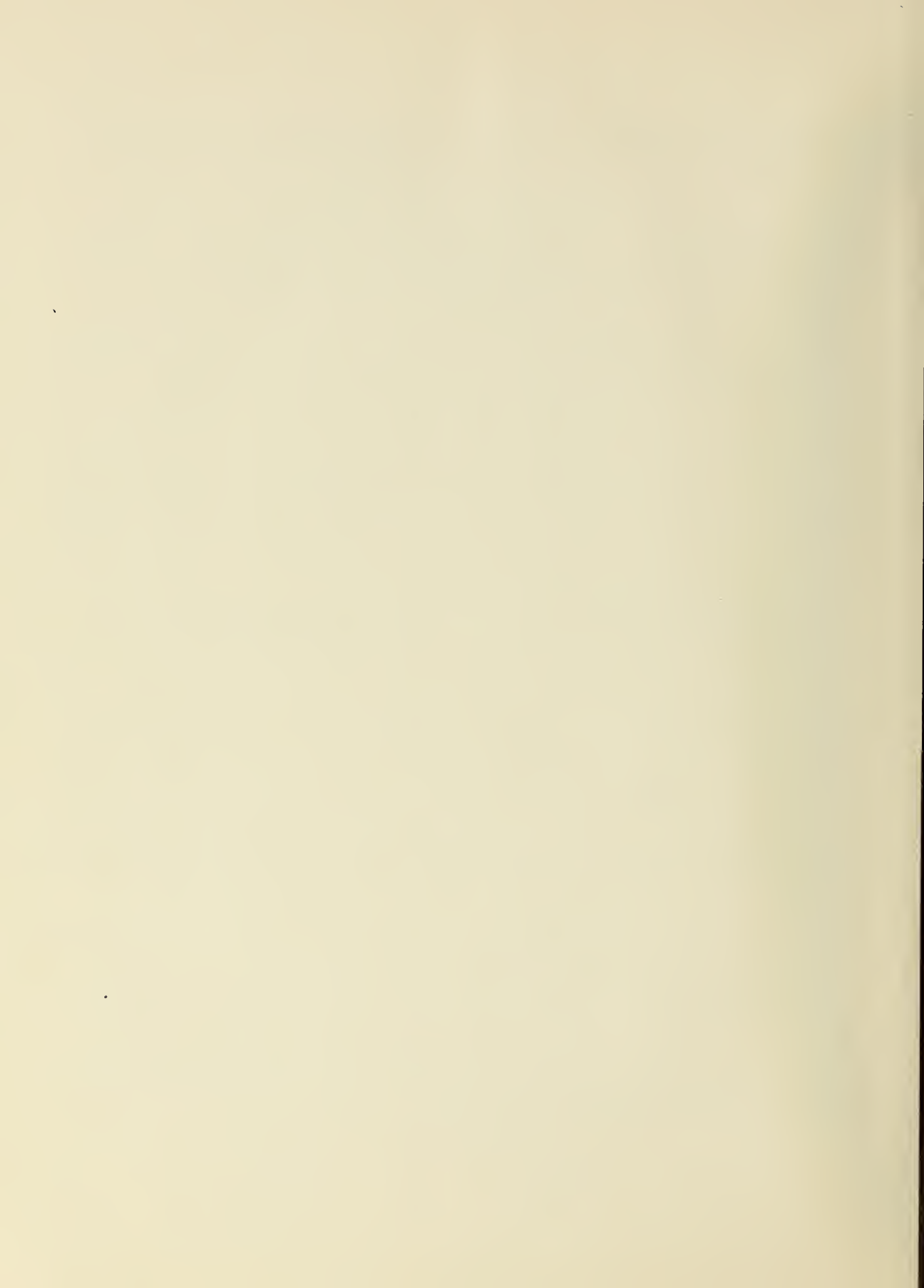
Meanwhile Captain Porter had decided to retrace the trail to Lanang and ask for a relief party to be sent out for his men, most of whom were now unable to march. He chose seven Marines who were in the best condition and with six natives they set out 3 January for Lanang. He left Lieutenant Williams in charge of the remainder of the detachment with orders to follow as soon as the condition of the men would permit. Lieutenant Porter's return to Lanang was made under difficulties many times greater than those encountered during the march to the interior. Food was almost totally lacking, and heavy rains filled the streams making it almost impossible to follow their banks or cross them as was so often necessary. On 11 January, Captain Porter reached Lanang and reported the situation to Captain Pickering. A relief



expedition was organized to go for the remainder of the Marines but it was unable to start for several days because of the swollen Lanang River. Without food, yet realizing that starvation was certain if they remained in camp, Lieutenant Williams and his men slowly followed Captain Porter's trail. One by one men dropped by the side of the trail. The native carriers became mutinous and some of them attacked Lieutenant Williams with bolos. After having left ten Marines along the trail, Lieutenant Williams was finally met by the relief party on the morning of 18 January and taken back to Lanang.

Lieutenant Williams, left in charge of the weakest men of the expedition, undoubtedly had the most trying task of the whole unfortunate affair. The full circumstances of his attempt to extricate these exhausted men from the midst of the wild tropical jungle is one of the most tragic yet the most heroic episodes in Marine Corps history. The entire march across Samar was about 190 miles. Major Waller's march including his return with the party searching for Captain Porter, was about 250 miles.

Major Waller's detachment of Marines was withdrawn from Samar and returned to Cavite on 2 March 1902, after having been relieved by troops of the U. S. Army.

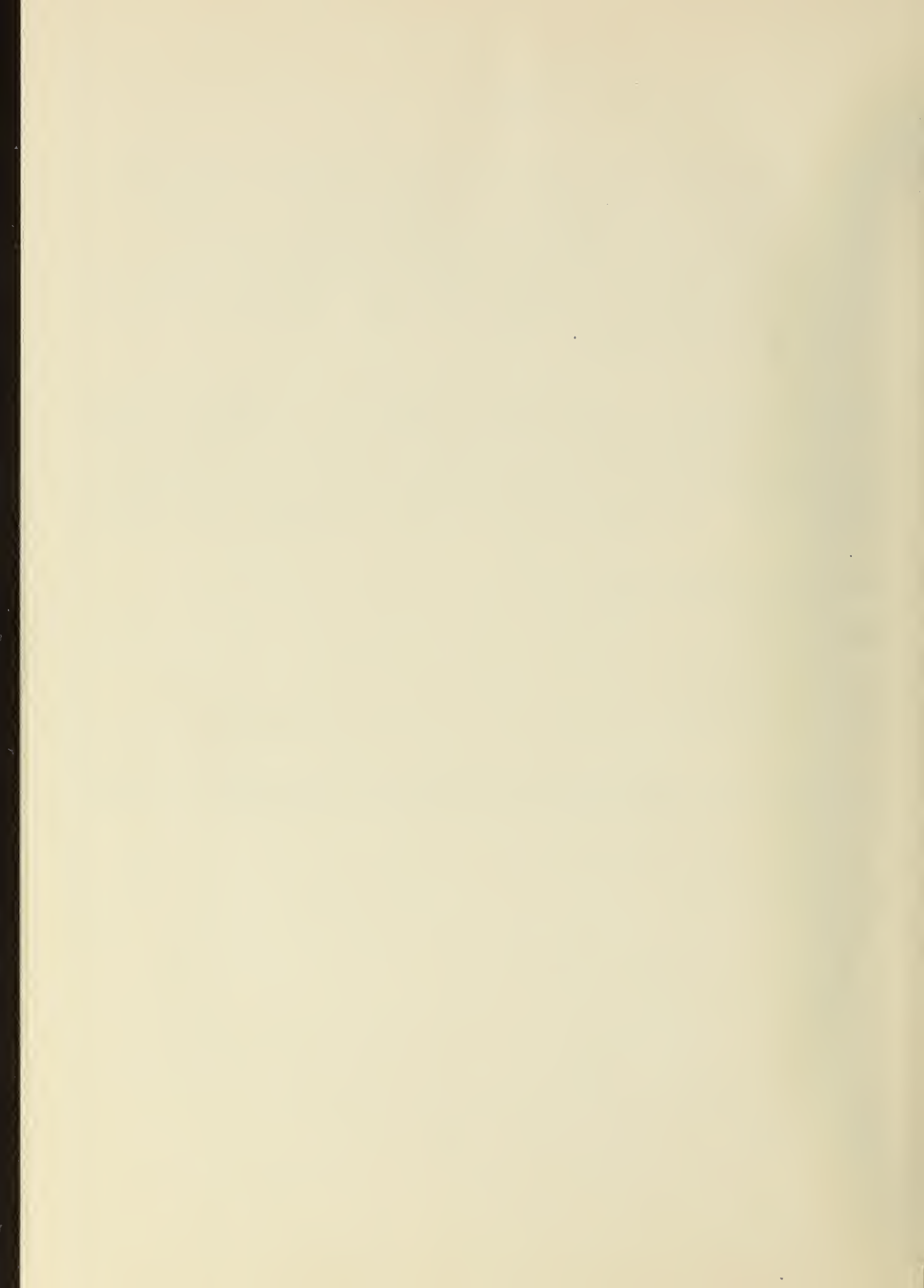


For many years, thereafter, officers and men of the United States Marine Corps paid a traditional tribute to the indomitable courage of these Marines by rising in their presence with the following words of homage: "STAND, GENTLEMEN, HE SERVED ON SAMAR!"



NOTES

1. Prior to September 1900, there was wide disparity concerning the proper title of the Marine Philippine Force. Brigadier General Commandant Heywood in his Annual Report for 1900, on pages 1102, 1116, and 1129, respectively, cites the Philippine Force as the "First Regiment of Marines." "Report of the Commandant of the Marine Corps," contained in the Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1900. (Hereafter cited as CMC Report with year)
2. From the time of his arrival, Colonel Pope called his command "Manila Battalion." CMC Report, 1899, 931; Lieutenant Colonel Elliott, succeeding Pope as CO of the Philippine Force, called his command "Marine Brigade," although it was not until after September 1900 that official orders were promulgated organizing the Brigade. CMC Report 1899, 920-921; CMC Report 1900, 1105, 1109.
3. CMC Report, 1900, 1105.
4. Ibid., 1104
5. Ibid., 1105-1107.
6. Ibid., 1143-1144.
7. Clyde H. Metcalf; A History of the United States Marine Corps, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), pp. 280-282.
8. CMC Report, 1900, pp. 1148-1149.
9. Ibid., 1150-1151.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 1121-1122.
14. Ibid., 1159



15. Ibid., 1160
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. CMC, 1901, 1276.
19. Ibid., 1277
20. Ibid., 1280.
21. Ibid., 1276.
22. Ibid., 1278
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 1278-9.
25. Ibid., 1228.
26. The account of the Marines in Samar is taken in toto from a manuscript by Joel D. Thacker, "Stand Gentlemen, He Served on Samar!" March 1945, in Subject File, Archives, HQMC.

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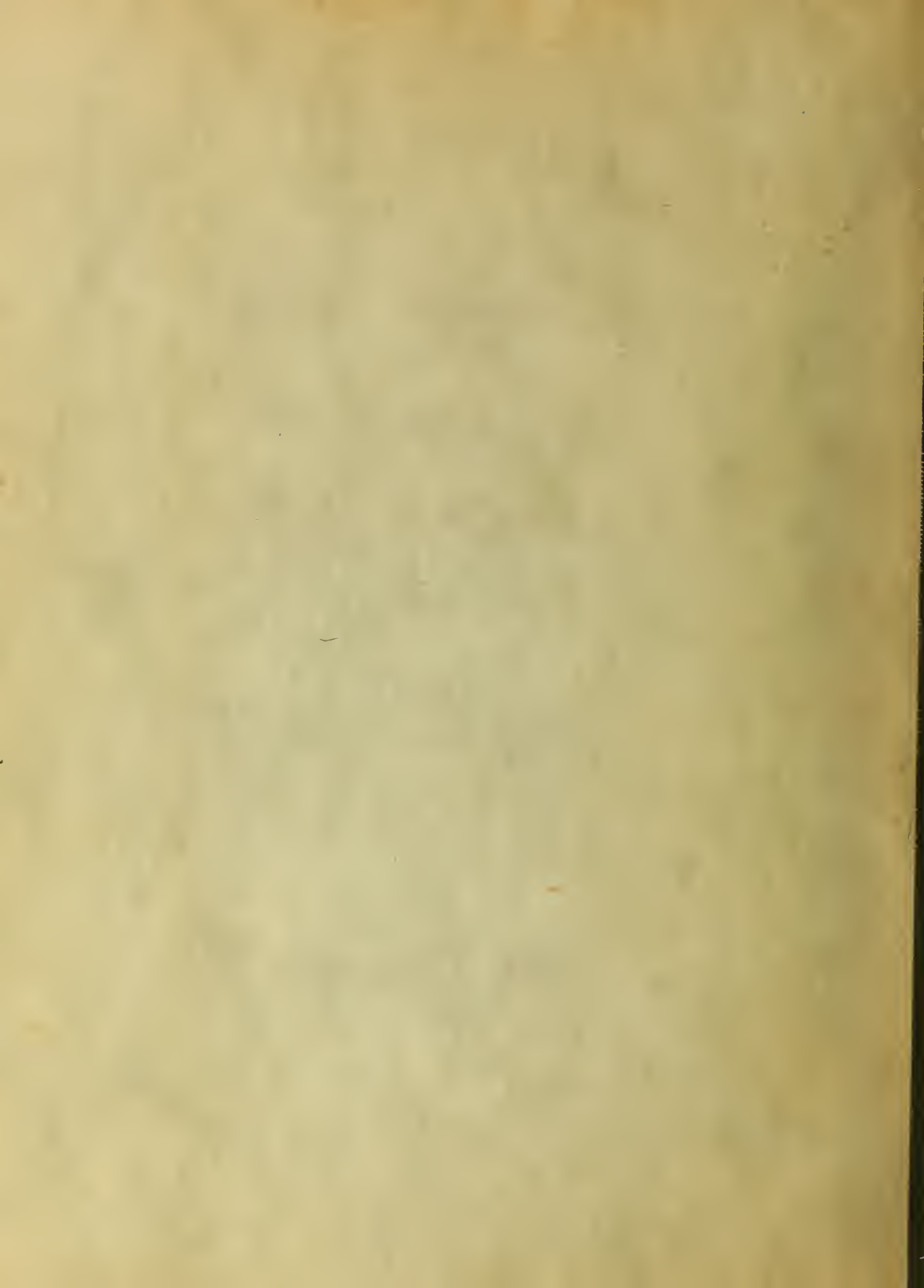
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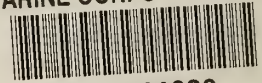
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