

A BANDIT THREAT TO THE BURLINGAME MISSION

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LATE in November, 1867, Anson Burlingame resigned his post as U. S. Minister to China and accepted the invitation of the *Tsungli Yamen* to take part in China's first diplomatic mission to the Treaty Powers.¹ The minister's party left Peking on November 25, 1867. The second day out of Peking there occurred the exciting adventure described in this letter.

The letter writer was Burlingame's sixteen-year old son, Walter Anson, and the "Dear Grandpa" to whom the letter was written was the Hon. Isaac Livermore of Boston. The letter is reproduced as it was written except for the omission of some irrelevant material at the end. Modern versions of place names, when identifiable, are given in brackets. The spelling and grammar are Walter's.

Shanghai Dec. 12th [1867]

Dear Grandpa

As Mother had no time to give you an account of our dangerous and exciting journey from Peking to this place, I will begin at the beginning and tell you all about it.

We left Peking on Monday, the 25th Nov. We were escorted out of the city by nearly all the foreign residents of Peking, who bade us a touching farewell. We stopped for the night at a town called Chan-chia-wan [Chungkiawan] about 16 miles from Peking.

The next morning we started early, intending to reach a small town some 30 miles from Chan-Chia-wan. It was a fearfully cold, windy day. About 4 o'clk, we passed through Hoo-se-wow [Hosiwu], a small town with about 1000 people. I was riding in advance of the mule litters, on my little pony and the *marfu* (horseboy) was also with me. We were about three miles past Hoo-se-wow and one mile in advance of the litters, when I met our carts coming across the country as tight as they could come, the mules galloping and the drivers looking frightened out of their wits. I immediately stopped them and asked what was the matter.

"One pieces thief man have stopped that Yan-sung side," replied Ah Quang, in an

¹ The standard account of the Burlingame Mission is F. W. Williams, *Anson Burlingame and the first Chinese mission to foreign powers* (New York: Chas. Scribners Sons, 1912). Results of more recent research are given in: K. Biggerstaff, "A translation of Anson Burlingame's instructions from the Chinese foreign office," *FAR EASTERN QUARTERLY*, 1 (May 1942), 277-279; and W. B. Walsh, "The beginnings of the Burlingame mission," *FAR EASTERN QUARTERLY*, 4 (May, 1945) 274-277.

excited manner. I did not understand at first, but upon examination I discovered that a large band of mounted robbers had taken possession of the town where we had intended to stop for the night. Ah Quang said the robbers were 500 to 600 strong, were well mounted and armed and were scouring the country in all directions, and unless we wanted to be captured, we must go back to Hoo-se-woo to spend the night. I rode back at full speed, stopped the litters, turned them round and back we went to Hoo-se-woo. Upon arriving at Hoo-se-woo we found the town in a great state of alarm, the farmers flocking in from all directions, bringing fearful accounts of the "Che-mah-tsay" (mounted robbers). We stopped at an inn on the outskirts of the town, which was almost a natural fort.

Immediately upon arriving we ran our carts up against the big wooden gates and made a very effectual barricade. We then searched our trunks and found we had a supply of arms and ammunition. We loaded our guns and pistols and laid them down ready for use upon the slightest alarm for we were afraid they would come every minute. After dinner we sent for the highest mandarin of the town and told him to muster all his forces immediately. He said he had no troops in town, having sent them off in another direction. We said no matter for that, he must collect all the farmers and arm them with pitchforks or anything else they could pick up. He said he could not collect them that night but would have them ready the next morning. Before going to bed, Father dispatched couriers to Tientsing [sic] and Peking for aid. We started them both off, about 10½ o'clk in the evening, with instructions to ride night and day, no matter whether they killed their ponies or not. Hoo-se-woo is exactly 40 miles from both Peking and Tientsing. We also appointed the room in which Dr. Salter, Mr. Bradford and I slept, as guardhouse, arsenal, and general headquarters, and after distributing our arms and appointing places for each of us in case of a fight, we "turned in," determined to get as much sleep as possible, for none of us knew "what the morrow might bring forth." It was a terribly cold, windy night, and things looked gloomy enough. Our room was only about 14 ft. long and 7 or 8 ft. wide. When I say room, I don't mean what the people at home call room, but what they would call a mud hut. Three sides of our room (or hut, whichever you like to call it) were made of mud, and the fourth side simply of paper. The roof was made of bamboo covered with tiles, and heaved up and down tremendously whenever the wind got at it. However, after putting my revolvers under my pillow, and rolling myself up in my blanket, I soon forgot the room, the wind, the cold, Hoo-se-woo, and the "Che-mah-tsay," and slept as soundly as I ever did in my life.

When I woke up next morning, I found Mr. Bradford and the Dr. talking with a Foreigner who had just arrived. It turned out to be Mr. Williamson of Tientsing, who having arrived at Hoo-se-woo very early in the morning, had feared to go on and hearing we were in the town, had come to join us. He was welcomed most heartily for every recruit helped in such a time, and he was also a blessing, because he spoke Chinese. We found matters more alarming than ever for during the night the rebels had approached nearer and were burning the villages.

We sat down to breakfast, but hardly had we begun to eat when Ah Quang came running in with the report that the rebels were only 15 li (5 miles) away. We armed ourselves and were ready for them, but it turned out that they were moving to the westward to attack a small village some 3 miles from us. We were hardly at the

table again, when hearing a tremendous thumping of gongs etc. in the street, we ran out to see what was up. We found the mandarin had brought out his forces, and was parading them for our benefit. What a strange looking set they were! Some were armed with pitch-forks, some with spears, some with clubs, and a few with matchlocks. There were about 100 all told, and at least two thirds of these were boys. They were good, honest farmers however, and I believe would have fought well had they been well armed. As it was, they were more for appearance's sake, than anything else. They were posted about a quarter of a mile from the inn and were under orders to retreat on the inn, if they were pressed at all. After breakfast we tried to amuse ourselves as best we could. It was a strange looking scene! There we were, ladies, men, carts, mules, horses, ponies, all crowded together in this little square yard. Mother was sitting on the shaft of one of the carts, wrapped up in furs, trying to warm herself in the sun. Mary was sitting on another cart, and Gertie was running round among the mules, to the great danger of her limbs. Father, as General in Chief, was walking around giving orders to the mandarin about the distribution of the troops etc. Dr. Salter was engaged in entertaining Mother, and in driving off the mules when they came too near. Mr. Bradford was keeping guard over the arms and ammunition. Mr. Williamson was with Father, acting as interpreter, and Whelan, our gallant "regular army," was standing, dressed in full uniform, by the side of the "Colonel," Mother's horse. Occasionally he would mount and gallop to the front, to encourage the troops and to see if everything was all right. I was lying in a cart, trying to read the "Atlantic Monthly." I did not read very much however for as soon as I began to get interested a scout would come riding in with the report that "The rebels are coming" or "The rebels are going," some saying one thing, some another, but all agreeing that the rebels were only waiting for a good opportunity to attack the town. They (the rebels) carried a blood red flag with the words "Let the poor rejoice," written on it in black characters. By this means they were increasing rapidly, gaining recruits at every village. About 5 o'clock a scout came riding in at the full run, shouting out "Che-mah-tsay"! Che-mah-tsay! li-la! (The robbers! The robbers!—They have come!). The fellow had ridden so hard that his pony dropped down, completely used up. In a minute, Whelan had mounted and galloped off, the carts were run up against the gates, we were all armed and each one at his place. This time the rebels were coming and no mistake. They were already firing on our extreme front for we could plainly hear the report of guns. By climbing on the roof we could see, about a mile off, the dust raised by the horses. We could also see the gallant Whelan, darting from one body of our men to another, waving his sword and encouraging them in every way possible.

The mandarin of the town soon joined us at the inn. He was in a fearful state of fear. He turned perfectly yellow and trembled so he could hardly stand up. He said the rebels would certainly kill him, if they came, and would take all his money. We were awfully indignant at him. Ah Quang was tremendously disgusted. He said "That man no belong brave man, he belong coward." We fully agreed with the great Ah Q.

But soon the firing ceased and from my place on the roof I could see the cloud of dust moving off. A few minutes afterwards a scout came riding in, saying that the rebels, as soon as they saw Whelan at the head of the villagers, had thought that

there was a large force of foreigners behind, and had determined to be more careful. This idea was confirmed by another scout coming in and reporting the rebels to have divided into three parties of 200 men each, one party on the west of the town, another on the south, and the third on the east. This was very crafty on the part of the rebels, but very bad for us for we were now protected only on one side.

It was growing dark, and there was only one plan left and that was a pretty hopeless one. That was to gather our forces into the town, throw out pickets, and upon the approach of the rebels to all withdraw into the inn yard, where we would make a desperate fight of it. As the mandarin was too much frightened to do anything, Father gave these orders himself.

It was now nearly time to expect our friends from Tientsing and Peking. About 7 o'clk. a scout came in, reporting the rebels to have encamped for the night. This looked more hopeful for we were sure relief would come before morning. But we were soon as anxious as before for soon another scout came in, saying that the rebels had not encamped but were drawing nearer, and were evidently waiting off and on for a good opportunity to pounce down upon the town. As Ah Quang expressed it "No man must sleppy, must keep that eye open, must belong *number one* careful."

After dinner we appointed watches for the night. Dr. Salter and Father had the first watch, from 9 to 12½ o'clk. Whelan and I had the second from 12½ to 4—Mr. Bradford and Mr. Williamson the third, from 4 to 7½. The duty of the watch was to keep an eye on the things in general inside the yard, to receive the scouts when they came in, and to wake the rest up on the slightest alarm. We were expecting our friends now almost as much as an attack of the rebels. We expected every minute either to have to beat back an attack of the rebels or to welcome our friends. However, the first watch passed off quietly, and at 12½ I was roused up to perform my duty. It was a beautiful clear night, but rather too cold to be pleasant. But we wrapped up warm, in coats, cloaks, furs, etc. and took our places. I carried one revolver in my hand and one stuck in my belt. We were under orders to let no one go out or come in, without first having been examined by the guard, for we were continually being warned by the Chinese to look out for spies. Our watch passed off very quietly, and at 7 o'clk, I roused up the relief and turned in.

About 8 o'clk next morning we received a letter from Mr. Mongan, British Consul at Tientsing, saying he had sent Captain Dunlop of *H. M. S. Dove*, with 12 marines and sailors together with Messrs. Fraser, Shee, and Jones who had volunteered for the occasion. Besides these he had sent Gen. Brown (who commands the foreign drilled Chinese cavalry at Tientsing) with 30 of his best cavalrymen.

You can perhaps imagine how we received this joyful news.

About 11 o'clk, a courier who had been sent on to announce their approach, arrived. We all gathered together outside the inn and prepared to receive them with three rousing cheers. In a few minutes the cry of "Wi-cor-jen li-la"! (The foreigners have come) was raised by the Chinese, and soon we saw them coming up the road, the horses galloping, the men cheering, the sabres flashing—Well! There is not a bit of use trying to describe it. You must try and imagine the scene as well as you can.

Hardly were we through cheering when, hearing a great commotion in the street, we ran out just in time to see the gallant Murray at the head of the Peking force,

come galloping up the street. We were perfectly wild with excitement. We cheered, yelled, slapped each other on the back, etc., etc., etc. I never was so excited in my life. We ordered Ah Quang to get up an immense breakfast for them and he succeeded splendidly. Now our relief had come, we were as anxious to have the rebels come as we had been before not to have them. As the men and horses were equally tired out by their hard ride, we resolved not to go on until the next day.

About 4 o'clock a scout came in, reporting the rebels to be within a few li of the town We were awfully glad to hear this for we wanted to finish them up. We had in all about 40 brave, well-armed, and trusty men, and I guess we would not have had much trouble with 500 robbers. The sailors were armed with cutlasses, rifles, and revolvers. The Peking escort men had sabres and revolvers and were mounted on immense foreign horses, just out from India. Brown's Chinese cavalry had sabres and carbines. With such a force we could have smashed the "Che-mah-tsay" all to pieces. We formed and marched out to meet them. I wanted awfully to go but as I was mounting my pony the stern Murray hurled me off and, much to my indignation, ordered me to stay behind to protect the ladies. The force marched out but soon came back again, very much disappointed for the force turned out to be a party of Chinese troops who were coming to join the rest at Hoo-se-woo.

We started off for Tientsing at 6½ next morning. We looked very fine marching out of the town. In advance were Brown's cavalry, then came the mule litters, then our 28 carts, and then the jack tars bringing up the rear. The escort men rode on each side of the train. We made a procession about a mile long.

We found traces of the rebels all along the road. At every village we found the people, armed with spears, clubs etc., standing ready to receive us for they thought we were robbers. At a place about 3 miles from Hoo-se-woo, the rebels had looted the town, killing two of the rich mandarins. About 6 miles from Hoo-se-woo, a severe fight had occurred between the villagers and the rebels in which quite a number were killed on both sides.

About 12 o'clock we stopped at Yan-sung for breakfast. We reached Tientsing about 10½ P. M. after a hard, wearying ride for 45 miles.

Dr. Salter, Mr. Bradford and myself stopped at Mr. Meadow's while in Tientsing. The rest stopped at Mongan's.

On the 6th Dec. we started for Ta-ku, on board *H. M. S. Dove*. Arriving at Ta-ku we found the U. S. Man of War *Ashuelot* waiting for us. We started on the 7th for Shanghai, arriving here after a pleasant voyage, on the 10th. Thus ended our ever memorable voyage from Peking to Shanghai. It is very nice to laugh at now it is over, but I can assure you it was no laughing matter at the time.

Had we known that there were any robbers on the road, before we started we could easily have obtained a guard of 500 soldiers from the Chinese Government, and all this delay and anxiety would have been prevented. We learned at Tientsing that the government at Peking having heard of our delay at Hoo-se-woo, had dispatched 1000 troops to our relief. The troops, hearing we had retreated to Lung-chan, had marched there to meet us, and in this way had missed us. This really was the case for while in Tientsing, Father had a dispatch from the Ya-nun, saying that 1000 troops had been sent to relieve him. The Government, therefore, acting

in a prompt and proper manner and are not to blame for the troops not reaching us.

What do you think about the "Embassy"?² Didn't it make some excitement? It excited everyone here. Some said one thing, some another, but everyone agreed that it was a tremendously big thing. . . .

Give my love to Grandma, Auntie, and all the rest at home, and accept a large share for yourself.

From your aff. grandson

Walter.

"Merry Christmas to all."

² *I.e.*, The Burlingame Mission.

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