The Boxer Rebellion

By Jane Runyon

1 As the twentieth century dawned on the world, China was being ripped apart. For centuries, the Chinese had been ruled by an emperor. In charge at this turn of the century was the dowager empress, Tsu Hsi, of the Ch'ing Dynasty. The situation was not good for the Chinese people. A drought in the northern part of the country had the people near starvation. Foreign countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Great Britain, and Russia had moved into China. They were claiming certain parts of the country as their own. The army was not strong enough to do anything about it.

2 The United States was making a move into Asia as well. After the Spanish-American War, the United States had laid claim to the Philippine Islands. They saw that other countries of the world were setting themselves up for trade centers by claiming land in China. The US government knew that they would get nowhere by claiming land for themselves by using force. They decided to put themselves into a good position by using diplomatic means.

3 John Hay was the United States Secretary of State at the time. He proposed a plan to all of the foreign powers who had established themselves in China. He called his plan an "Open Door" policy. It was his idea that all countries should have equal trading rights in the area. No one country would be allowed to cut out any other country from trade with the world. It was a fair and equal plan. Secretary Hay presented it to all the other countries, and they agreed that it was fair. They also said that they would not support or abide by it. Secretary Hay would not be deterred. He announced to the world that since all the foreign trade countries had agreed to the plan in principle, the United States would consider it an agreement.

4 While all of these foreign nations were busy fighting with each other, Empress Tsu Hsi was busy herself. She was tired of her country being ripped apart by these nations who had no right to be there. She was trying to create a plan that would deliver her country back to the Chinese.

5 There was a group of people making plans of its own. The group was called the Fists of Righteous Harmony. It was a secret society. This group called for the overthrow of the Empress and the expulsion of the foreign countries they felt were causing all of their problems. The group grew larger each day.

6 The Empress heard about this secret society and decided to use them to her advantage. She used members of her royal household to work with the group. The group became known as Boxers. They got this name because they were proficient in the use of the martial arts. Before long, the Boxers were supporting the Empress and calling for the destruction of foreigners on their soil.

7 In 1900, reports were made of Boxers attacking Christian missionaries in the Chinese countryside. They destroyed the missions and killed the people manning them. They moved from the countryside into the city. They picked up more and more followers as they moved to the larger cities. The foreign diplomats started to get nervous. The Boxers were getting stronger by the day. They appealed to the Empress. She told them she would see what she could do to help them. What they didn't know was that she was helping the Boxers instead. She assured the foreigners that this "rebellion" would be stopped by her soldiers. Instead, her army stood aside as the Boxers entered the capital.

8 The diplomats from all the foreign countries banded together for their own protection. They gathered at a walled compound just outside the walled Forbidden City in Beijing. What they faced was a force of
20,000 Boxers who advanced on their compound. Though small in number, the military inside the compound was able to hold off the attack of the Boxers. For almost two months the siege continued. Food, ammunition, and medical supplies were running low. Then one morning the diplomats awoke to a thunderous sound. What they saw was a column of armed men marching on their compound. When they looked closer, they saw that the group was made up of men from their own countries. This group of well-armed and well-trained men was able to rout the Boxers in short order.

This group of soldiers had been sent to China after the home countries had not heard from their diplomats in over a month. The soldiers went through the capital looting as they went. The Empress was forced to run away dressed as a peasant. The Ch'ing Dynasty was no more.

After the Boxers were dispersed, the foreign countries proceeded to use the United States Open Door policy. Trade expanded and foreign countries continued to claim their own areas for trade development. This was the way of life in China until World War II when they were able to "shut" the open door again.

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1. The Chinese welcomed foreign countries to use their country for trade.
   - A True
   - B False

2. Who ruled China in the early 1900's?
   - A A czar
   - B A king
   - C An emperor
   - D An empress

3. What land claim did the United States make in Asia at this time?
   - A Japan
   - B The Philippines
   - C Part of China
   - D Beijing

4. What was the Open Door policy proposed by the United States?

5. What was the original goal of the Boxers?

6. What was the official name of the Boxers?
   - A Supporters of China
   - B The Boxing Club of China
   - C Fists of Righteous Harmony
   - D Fists for Fighting

7. How long were the foreign diplomats able to hold off the Boxer attack?
   - A Two days
   - B Two weeks
   - C Two years
   - D Two months

8. How long did the Open Door Policy stay in effect?
   - A About 20 years
   - B About 40 years
   - C About 10 years
   - D About 30 years