

**A DIARY OF THE SIEGE OF
THE LEGATIONS
IN PEKING: DURING
THE SUMMER OF 1900**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649037575

A Diary of the Siege of the Legations in Peking: During the Summer of 1900 by Nigel Oliphant & Andrew Lang

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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NIGEL OLIPHANT & ANDREW LANG

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DURING THE SUMMER OF 1900

BY
NIGEL OLIPHANT

WITH A PREFACE BY ANDREW LANG

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LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

89 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1901

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PREFACE

THE author of this Diary of the Siege of the Peking Legations, Mr. Nigel Oliphant, comes of a house accustomed to sieges from of old. The founder of the Oliphants, or rather the first of the Norman family of Olifard, or Olifand, who received lands in Scotland, was David Olifard. He was a godson of David I., King of Scotland, whose life he saved at the Siege of Winchester, in 1141. In 1304, Sir William Oliphant held Stirling Castle against Edward I., displaying the utmost tenacity, courage, and resource, after the rest of Scotland had submitted, and surrendering only when the English artillery, and the great engine called 'The Warwolf,' made resistance impossible. With the fall of Stirling the cause of Scotland died, till it was revived, two years later, by Robert Bruce. Colin, Master

of Oliphant, and his brother Laurence, fell at Flodden. The military qualities of the family, and their steadfast loyalty, were illustrated in the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745, in the cases of the Lairds of Gask, Condie, and Rossie, from the last of whom Mr. Nigel Oliphant descends, being the son of Mr. T. T. Oliphant, who, with his brother, took part in the Umbeyla Campaign of 1863, the latter being fatally wounded.

Mr. Nigel Oliphant was born in the old house which Queen Mary used to occupy at St. Andrews, on December 19, 1874. His brother, David, who unfortunately fell under the Chinese fire, was born on July 10, 1876. In 1896 he had passed second in the open competition for student interpreterships in China. Early in 1897 he went to Peking, where, in each of the two subsequent years, he passed first in the examination in Chinese. Sir Claude MacDonalld, recognising his ability, kept him in the Chancery Office of the Legation, instead of sending him as an assistant to one of the Consulates.

Nigel, the elder brother, and author of the

following Diary, kept under fire, was less apt in passing examinations, which proved fortunate in an educational sense. He preferred the sword to the pen, and enlisted in the Scots Greys, the famous old regiment that had Claverhouse for colonel. He was thence transferred to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, with whom he served in India, being lance-corporal. He thus acquired the military experience which proved so invaluable in the Siege of the Legations. There being no appearance of war, Mr. Nigel Oliphant, early in 1899, received from Sir Robert Hart, who knew his brother David, a post in the Chinese Postal Service, where he was engaged when the troubles broke out in 1900. Though his experience in the Army must have been useful training, his brother David, who had none, was twice mentioned in Sir Claude MacDonald's despatches for his military capacity. Perhaps we may say *bon chien chasse de race*, and the Oliphants had some eight hundred years of military adventure behind them. The two young Oliphants regarded war with gaiety, and the siege had hardly begun

when they laid out a putting course on the lawn of the British Legation. Later, after the besieged were relieved, and while still suffering from a wound received in action, Mr. Nigel Oliphant helped to lay out links of larger proportions. These two young men and their comrades took war 'with a frolic welcome.' In spite of discomforts and illnesses on which the Diary as published is silent, it is plain enough that the Oliphants would have much enjoyed the excitement of battle, had it not been for the presence of helpless women and children. These non-combatants also displayed great courage and confidence, though the fate of the victims at Cawnpore seemed to be hanging over them.

These few lines are not intended to anticipate or to criticise the narrative of events which Mr. Nigel Oliphant kept through days and nights of danger, grief, and pain; and, perhaps, with no confident hope that the story of suffering and valour would ever come into the hands of his family. To them Her Majesty, our lamented Queen, acknowledged her sense of the services of the one who fell, and her sympathy with