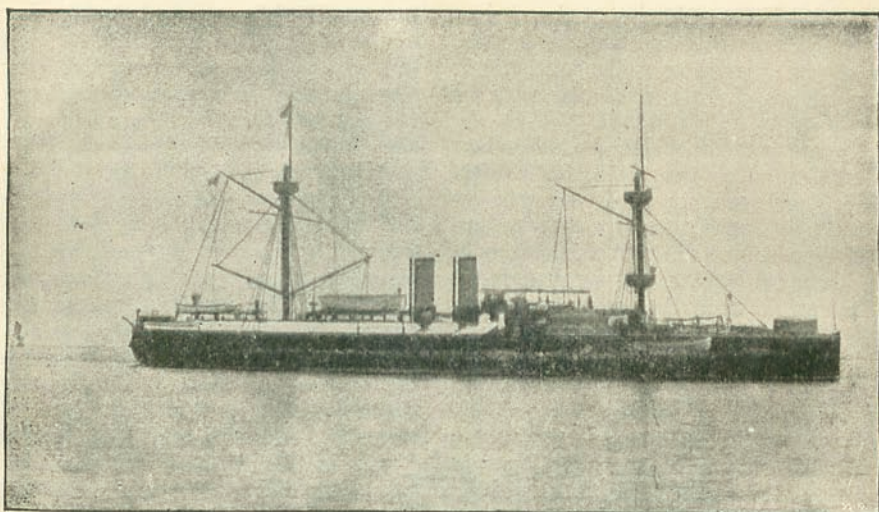


Illustrated Interviews.

No. XLV.—CAPTAIN M'GIFFIN—COMMANDER OF THE "CHEN YUEN" AT THE BATTLE OF YALU RIVER

By ALFRED T. STORY.



From a

CAPTAIN M'GIFFIN'S BATTLE-SHIP THE "CHEN YUEN."

[Photograph.]

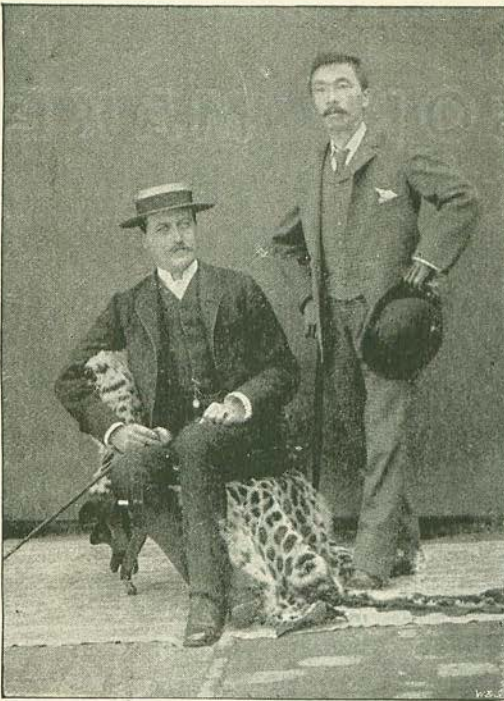


ALTHOUGH the Battle of the Yalu River was fought over a year ago, it is still fresh in the world's memory, and probably will be for many a long day, not only because of the sensation it occasioned at the time, but for the reason that it showed the engines and implements of modern naval warfare in action as they had never been shown before, and so proved an object-lesson in the art of war of the most inestimable value. The eye-witnesses of the fight who were in a position to take an intelligent view of it were so few, and our information respecting it is consequently so scanty and imperfect, that too much can hardly be made of the evidence of Captain Philo Norton M'Giffin, who was the only European officer in command of any of the ships, either Chinese or Japanese. In reality, Captain M'Giffin was commander of the *Chen Yuen*, sister ship to the *Ting Yuen*, which was the flag-ship of Admiral Ting, the chief officer being Commodore Lin, who, as will be seen, was early put *hors-de-combat*, so far as all power of command was concerned, and M'Giffin had in consequence to take sole charge.

Captain M'Giffin went out to China twelve years ago, to take the position of professor of mathematics and of naval matters generally at the Naval College at Tien Tsin, which is between forty and fifty

miles from the sea, while the College itself was some four miles from the nearest river—"a proper sort of place for a naval school," observed Captain M'Giffin. None of the cadets—over 100 in number—had ever seen the sea or a ship, and being nearly all married men with families, they had no desire or intention of serving in the navy. They were simply cadets because the position was a salaried one, and they had influence enough to be appointed to the posts. "They were a poor lot," said Captain M'Giffin; "if I wanted them to do a bit of work to bring them forward in their studies, they immediately got leave and went to their families." After a few months, however, he took the senior class to sea in a training ship, and in the course of a couple of years turned out some very good officers. During this time Captain M'Giffin did a great deal of surveying work, making, in particular, a complete survey of the coast of Corea, and drawing up charts of it.

In 1887, through his instrumentality, the Naval Academy at Wei-Hai-Wei was established. It was under his direction, Lieutenant Bouchier, of the Royal Navy, being his colleague as gunnery instructor. Here, most of the Chinese officers who served in the war received their instruction in naval matters. Captain M'Giffin was thus in a position to judge of the material of which the *personnel* of the Navy was composed;



CAPTAIN M'GIFFIN AND ASSISTANT.
From a Photo, by La Fong, Ch'foo.

and while he entertains the highest opinion of the common sailor for his courage and hardihood, nothing could well exceed his contempt for the Chinese officer. Although there were bright exceptions, as a rule they showed themselves to be the veriest poltroons. "The class to which they belong," says Captain M'Giffin, "the Mandarin class, is the very worst in China. It is not a part of their aim or traditions to be brave and manly; but all their thought is to get into a position where they can squeeze and oppress, and live easy, indolent lives on the fruits of their spoil."

When the war broke out, Captain M'Giffin was about to go on a visit to his friends in the United States, on sick leave, his health having been somewhat undermined by his eleven years in China; but he immediately returned his leave and volunteered to serve in the war, and was appointed to the iron-clad *Chen Yuen*.

Although M'Giffin does not appear to have entertained any very ardent anticipations in regard to what the Chinese navy might do in the war, he certainly expected greater things of it than was achieved. The first brush a Chinese vessel had with the enemy gave him food for reflection, as well as some amusement. A few days before war

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was declared, the torpedo cruiser *Tsi Yuen* went out to Corea to watch the landing of some Chinese troops. She returned a few days later, war having then broken out. He watched her go into harbour, and saw nothing to indicate that she had seen the enemy. But presently one of his men came into his office, and in reply to his question as to how matters had gone, he replied, "Plenty men sick." "I could not understand that," said Captain M'Giffin, "as there was nothing on board to make them sick; so I said, 'What on earth has made them sick?' Then the man became very excited and said, 'Plenty men break.' I knew at once what he meant. It was his way of saying that there were a lot of wounded men on board; they had been in action. I immediately went on board, and saw the 'broken' men and the evidences of the fight with my own eyes. The narrative of the action was not a reassuring one."

These and the following particulars were obtained from Captain M'Giffin on the occasion of a recent visit of his to this country. M'Giffin is a tall, muscular-looking man, with a strong, resolute face, and an eye that indicates that he would be a bad man to have as an enemy. He is Scotch by descent, though American by birth. Judged by his accent, he might be English,



CAPTAIN M'GIFFIN AT 17.
From a Photo, by P. M. Zuller, U. S. Naval Academy.

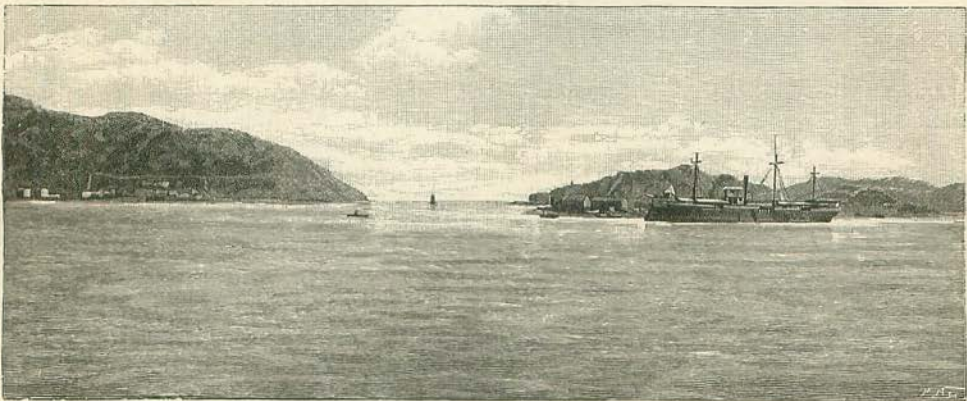
though he uses some Yankee idioms. Speaking of his Scottish ancestry, Captain M'Giffin relates an interesting fact in connection with the career of his great-grandfather, who, though born in Scotland, fought in the War of Independence as an officer on the side of the Colonists. In one of the battles in which he was engaged, he took several soldiers prisoners, and amongst them found his own brother. Captain M'Giffin is slow and deliberate in conversation, and prefers best to talk walking backwards and forwards as though on the quarter-deck. It was thus that the following narrative was drawn from his lips.

"It was," said he, "on the morning of the 17th of September, 1894, that we first sighted the Japanese fleet. Our squadron—under Admiral Ting Ju Chang—had arrived at the mouth of the Yalu River, in convoy of transports, the day before. The

torpedo-boats and four gunboats, besides our regular squadron, and they consequently thought we were even more formidable than we really were, because the torpedo-boats and the gunboats were up the river; and of the lot only two of the former joined us during the battle—and that when it was half over.

"While thus reconnoitring us," continued M'Giffin, "they were going parallel to our squadron, and, to the eyes of Commodore Lin, seemed to be steaming away from us.

"I shall never forget the effect the sight had upon the poor fellow. We were on the bridge together, and upon seeing them, as he thought, move away, his face became beaming, and he cried out, in English—he had previously been speaking in Chinese—clapping his hands together and striding along the bridge as he did so, 'Goddam, they retire! Goddam, they retire!' I said, 'They do not mean to go away, captain. We shall have our fight.'"



From a

THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER YALU—WHERE THE BATTLE TOOK PLACE.

[Photograph.]

disembarkation of the troops, which took place fifteen miles up the river, occupied the whole of the night. Next morning—Monday, the 17th—each ship went to general quarters, and we were busy exercising the crews at the guns, when the Japanese fleet came in sight. It was a beautiful day, with a gentle breeze, and we could see and count the number of their ships distinctly.

"As soon as we saw the enemy," said Captain M'Giffin, "and before they sighted us, we up anchor and started after them. As they were steaming ahead, and we were lying still, they made more smoke than we did, and so we got sight of them before they perceived us. But when we started in pursuit, they were immediately made aware of our presence by our increasing plumes of smoke. For a while they seemed to hold off, reconnoitring. They must have known that we had six

Captain M'Giffin explained that the men of the fleet had been spoiling for a fight for some time, in consequence of the jeers the soldiers at Wei-Hai-Wei and Port Arthur had been accustomed to throw at them because they had not destroyed the enemy's ships. The Commodore had pretended to be as eager to meet the Japanese as the men; but he was now overjoyed at the prospect of escaping the enemy, and continued to pace along the bridge and cry, "They retire! Goddam, they retire!"

"We followed them in this way for some distance," continued M'Giffin, "and then, being satisfied as to our actual strength, they showed us that they intended to fight. The battle began about 12.20 and lasted till about 5.30 p.m.

"I was on the bridge taking the range when the action began, and all through the

action I had little chance of seeing what was going on beyond the fighting of our own ship. But I had time to admire the enemy's line of battle. It was formed into two squadrons—the Flying Squadron, consisting of the *Yoshino*, *Takachiho*, *Naniwa*, and *Akitsushima*, which led; and the Principal Squadron, constituted of the *Matsushima* (Admiral Ito's flag-ship), *Itsukushima*, *Hasedate*, *Chiyoda*, *Fuso*, and *Hiyei*. The *Akagi* and *Saikio* formed a reserve. Our fleet, which advanced in a zig-zag line, consisted of ten ships, as follows: *Ting Yuen*, the flag-ship, *Chih Yuen*, *Tsi Yuen*, and *Kwan Chia*, forming the left wing; and *Chen Yuen*, *Lai Yuen*, *King Yuen*, *Ching Yuen*, *Chao Yung*, and *Yang Wei*, forming the right wing. The *Ping Yuen* and the *Kwang Ping*, with the two torpedo-boats, did not put in an appearance until the fight was half over.

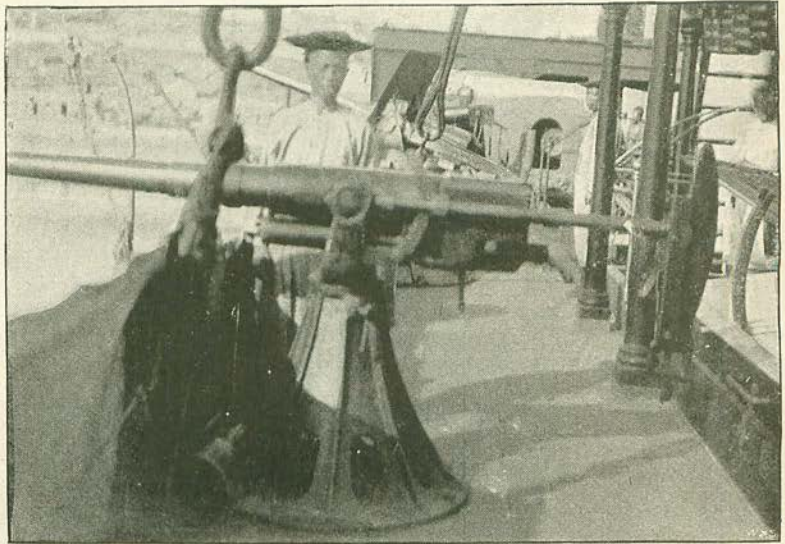
"But there was hardly time to admire the beauty of the scene before I was made aware that the action had begun in earnest by the *Ting Yuen* opening fire. We followed suit a minute or two afterwards, and the Japs soon replied

to our music. It was curious to see the effect upon our officers. A shot passed over us; it was only a ricochet; but it was enough to put all the fight out of the major part of them. Indeed, I may say that hardly one was seen after that. I saw our navigating lieutenant, a Foo-chow man—all a cowardly lot—disappear, pale as a ghost, from the starboard turret at the second shot.

"I had occasion to give him a bit of my mind, or, rather, of my foot, a little later. Something had gone wrong with the training engine of one of the turrets, and I was obliged to go down into the armoured place below to put it to rights. As I was getting down, somebody caught hold of my legs and tried to stop me, shouting out, 'There's no room for any more here—you must go somewhere else to hide.' I looked down, and saw

the navigating officer and some half a score more crouching there in mortal fear. I was so mad with the navigating lieutenant that I let him have one in the chest with my foot, knocking all the wind out of him. They let me go down after that, and so I was enabled to put the engine to rights."

No wonder the Japanese were victorious with such a foe. But even this was not the worst, for Captain M'Giffin found Commodore Lin—commander of the right wing, and his senior officer on the *Chen Yuen*—in an even still more degrading position than his officers. "Every now and then I heard a strange noise in the conning-tower below me," said the



VIEW OF STARBOARD SIDE OF SUPERSTRUCTURE OF THE "CHEN YUEN," AFT—SHOWING 3-POUNDER SEMI-AUTOMATIC MAXIM-NORDENFELDT GUN, AND TWO 6-POUNDER HOTCHKISS QUICK-FIRING GUNS. THE BREECH OF THE 6-INCH KRUPP GUN IS SEEN THROUGH THE DOOR IN SHIELD IN BACKGROUND. From a Photograph.

captain; "it was more like the howling of a dog than anything else I can liken it to, and I was very curious to know what it could be. However, I had not time to inquire then. But after a while I had occasion to go down into the conning-tower, in order to fight the ship, when, to my astonishment, who should I see but my worthy captain! He was lying grovelling on his stomach, jabbering as fast as he could in Chinese—praying, in fact praying and cursing in the same breath—and every time a shot struck the ship he howled like a dog. I shall never forget the sight, nor the sound, as long as I live. I felt inclined to kick him, although I didn't. But all through the engagement, I knew when a shot had struck us by his howls, though otherwise I was too much taken up with the fight to have noticed the impact of the shots.

"As to the fighting of the *Chen Yuen*," said Captain M'Giffin, "the worst risk we ran was when she got on fire forward. I was in the conning-tower, from whence I had been issuing orders, when a fire broke out in the superstructure over the fore-castle. It had made considerable headway when I gave orders for a line of hose to be run out. We were then in the hottest of the fight, and the men refused to go unless an officer led them. There was only one willing to undertake the job—the gunnery lieutenant in the port barbette, a fine, plucky fellow; but we could not spare him on account of his knowing so many of the Chinese dialects, and so I had to go myself.

"A number of men volunteered to follow me. We had no sooner reached the fore-castle than the awful fire of the enemy's guns began to tell upon us. One after another my men were fairly torn to pieces. A shot from a rapid-firing gun actually passed between my legs, wounding both wrists in its passage, and carrying away the tail of my coat. I was bending over pulling up a hose at the time. A shell hit the tower, and as it burst a piece struck me. I had just removed it when I received another wound in almost the same place, and from the same cause.

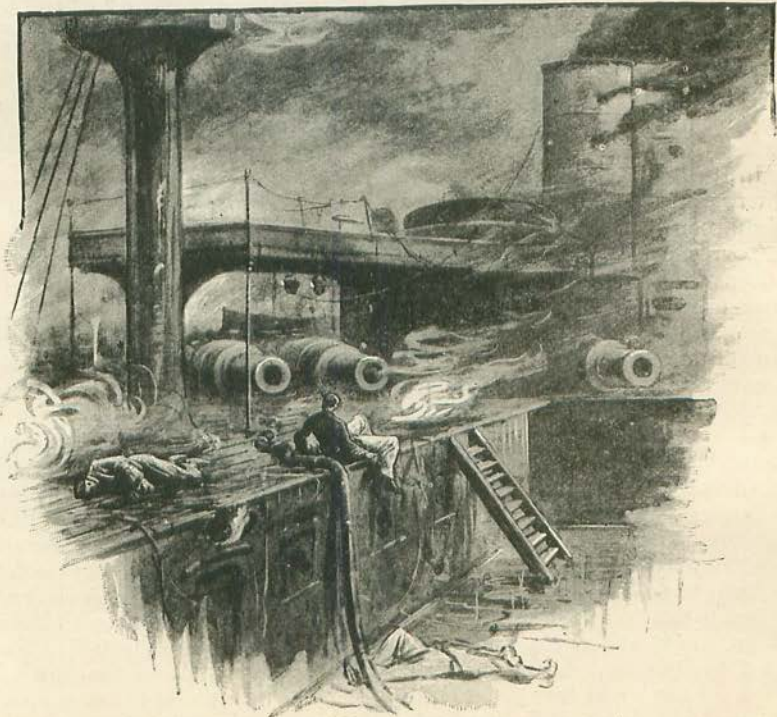
"At this time we were being peppered by three of the enemy's ships at close quarters—one on the port side, one on the starboard, and one right ahead; but the one on the port side was doing the most mischief, and so the men at the two starboard guns had been ordered to turn their guns round and try to silence the ship that was pressing us so hard on the port side. To do this, of course, they had to fire across the fore-castle. When, therefore, I and the men who had volunteered to go with me to put out

the fire were about to go forward, I ordered the head gunner at the starboard battery to cease firing at the vessel on the port side, and direct his guns at the ship right ahead, otherwise they would fire upon us. But the instant after I had turned my back, a shot knocked the head gunner to pieces, and the man who took his place did not know that we had gone forward, and, keeping the guns directed towards the ship on the port side, fired.

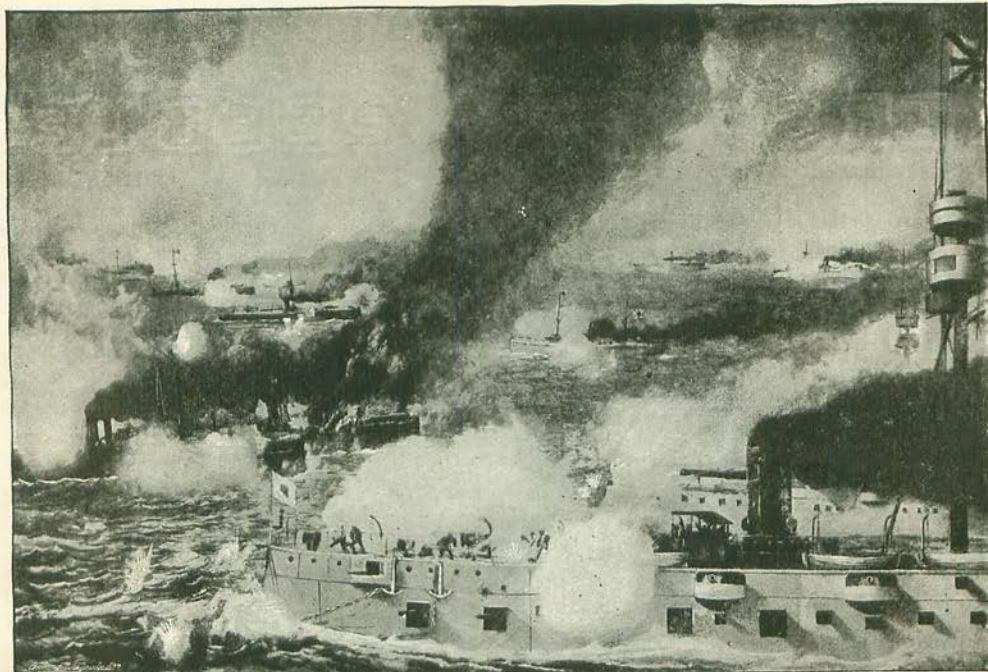
"The explosion blew all of us who were left off our legs. The man by my side, indeed, was killed. At the same time, a shot from one of the enemy's rapid-firing guns ripped across my body, cutting quite a gash, but not doing any serious injury. I was rendered unconscious, however. Fortunately, I had fallen upon a hose that had been torn by a shot, and the water spurting from the rent fell upon my face and revived me."

Captain M'Giffin here explained that the two guns were six feet apart, and he was lying ten feet in front of No. 2 gun when No. 1 went off. "The flash of it," said the captain, "was like an intense flash of lightning. It rendered me unconscious so quickly that, though I was so near, I did not hear the report of the gun.

"When I opened my eyes, I saw that I was right in front of the muzzle of the other



"I SAW THAT I WAS RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE MUZZLE."



From a Drawing by the]

THE BATTLE OF YALU.

[Japanese Artist, Bungo Sakuma.

starboard gun, and that my head was directly in the line of fire. I watched the training of the gun for a second or two; then, realizing that in another instant it would go off and I should be blown to pieces, I threw myself over the side of the superstructure on to the deck below, a depth of some eight feet. As I fell the gun went off.

"I fell heavily upon my chest, and a lot of blood gushed from my mouth, so that those who saw me thought I was dead, and left me where I was. I managed, however, to get round into the superstructure, near a shell-hoist. I hadn't been there long before a shot entered and smashed into the uptake. I then asked two of the four men at the hoist to carry me farther aft, so as to get away from the stench of sulphur, for I could not walk. We had not moved far from the spot before a shell burst just where we had been, blowing the other two men at the hoist to pieces. You will see the hole the shell made in the superstructure by this photograph"—showing the one reproduced in our illustration on page 623.

Captain M'Giffin is still suffering from the wounds he received on board the *Chen Yuen*, and he thinks that he will continue to suffer from them as long as he lives. When in England there were still pieces of shot lodged in the flesh of his left side and leg, which kept the wounds from healing. Within

the circumference of about a foot he seems to have been struck by at least from forty to fifty pieces of shot or shell. How he ever came out of the engagement alive is a miracle. "Our men," said he, "considered that I had a charmed life." In addition to his wounds, his clothes got on fire, and one of his eyes was badly injured, so that during the latter part of the action he was nearly blind.

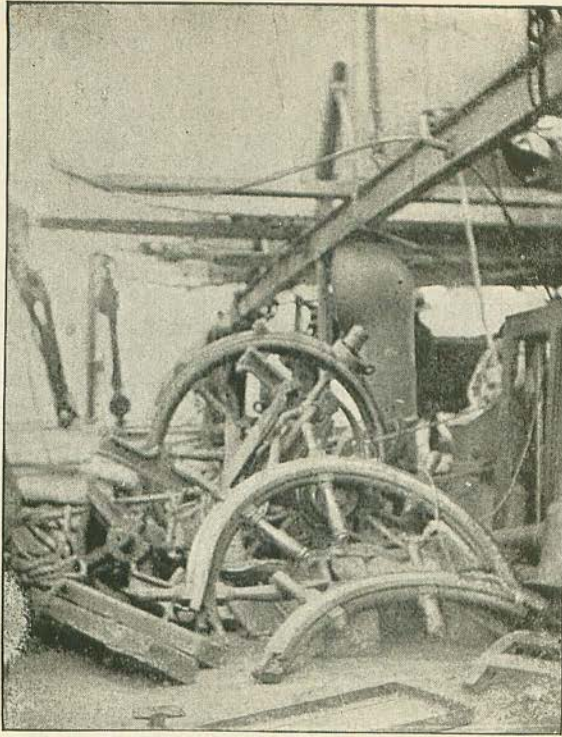
Asked a question with reference to the powers and qualities of the two fleets, Captain M'Giffin said that he went into action in the confident belief that the Chinese would win, the Japs being dubious as to the qualities of their ships in comparison with our armoured vessels. The Japanese were well served with ammunition, while the Chinese ran short. "We had very few shells for our big guns," said M'Giffin, "and the fuses of some of them were nothing but coal-dust." The captain attributes much of the disaster which befell the Chinese arms, both at sea and on land, to the treachery in high places which everywhere prevailed. Everybody, he avers, was in the pay of Japan, from Lo-Feng-Loh, the Chinese First Lord of the Admiralty, to the lowest official who had any information to sell.

"However, we did our best," continued Captain M'Giffin, as though conscious that he had deserved victory, if he had not

won it. "As for the *Chen Yuen*, she was in the thick of the fight all the time. The fact that no fewer than four hundred of the enemy's shots struck us ought to be fair proof of our having been in it. We were simply cut to pieces. But I flatter myself we gave back as good as they sent. It was the *Chen Yuen* that gave the Japanese flagship *Matsushima* such a mauling. If you remember, forty-nine officers and men were killed and over fifty wounded by one shell; while the gunnery lieutenant was blown into the sea, his cap and telescope being the only articles left as mementos of him.

"Soon after we brushed up against the *Matsushima* it was discovered that we had a few steel shells left for our 12.2in. gun. These shells were about 5ft. long, weighed 800lb., and carried a bursting charge of nearly 90lb. of powder. It was one of these shots that did such fearful execution. When the smoke cleared away we could see that it had wrought terrible destruction; but I did not know until afterwards the full extent of the damage. It appears from the Japanese report that it totally disabled their big 13in. Canet gun and exploded several charges of powder, which had been brought on deck in readiness for use.

"On the whole, I think our eight ships gave a very good account of themselves as against the thirteen Japanese vessels. For it must be remembered that the *Tsi Yuen* ran off in the beginning of the action, while the *Ping Yuen* was out of the way until the close of the fight, when she fired a shot or two, as it were, for form's sake, just as the enemy's fleet was clearing off. Indeed, the brunt of the fighting was sustained by the two ironclads, the *Ting Yuen* and the *Chen*



RUINS OF THE STEERING WHEEL. SEVEN MEN WERE KILLED BY THE FLYING SPLINTERS OF THIS WHEEL.

From a Photograph.

Yuen. The *King Yuen* caught fire in a very short time and went down. The *Lai Yuen* came very near suffering the same fate, as she also was set on fire. For a time all that her crew could do was to fight the conflagration.

"Yes, fire did the chief havoc with us. The *Chao Yung* and the *Yang Wei*, the two Armstrong cruisers, were made a set at by the enemy early in the action, and they were soon blazing furiously. Their thin sides were easily pierced by shells, and then their interior woodwork burned like match-board.

"The pluckiest thing that was done during the engagement? Well, the coolest courage was, perhaps, shown by a small boy, the brother of our gunnery lieutenant, who was on deck the whole time helping to hand things to the gunners, and who, though shot was falling all about, never flinched or showed the slightest fear. His brother was badly wounded, but he came off scatheless. He helped to carry his brother down when he was hit, but afterwards returned to his post, and remained at it till the end of the day. He was on board simply on a visit to his brother, not in any way as a part of the ship's company.

"But as regards the fighting of the ships, the most daring act was probably that of Captain Tang of the *Chih Yuen*, which, when making a move to support the *Lai Yuen*, was struck under the water-line by a shell or a torpedo — nobody knows — and at once took a heavy list. Seeing the game was pretty well up, Tang resolved to go for one of the big ships, intending to ram her. But the Japs, perceiving his game, rained a perfect hurricane of shot and shell upon him, with the result that the list became greater, and just before she reached her intended

victim, she rolled over and plunged, bows foremost, to be seen no more. Only seven of her crew were saved.

"One of the strangest things about the affair is that Captain Tang might have been saved but for a dog he had. It was a big, savage brute—too much sometimes for his master to manage. When the ship went down, Tang got hold of a piece of floating wreckage, and was supporting himself above the water with it when his dog swam to him, mounted upon his back, seized him by the throat, and compelled him to loose his hold, thus drowning him along with himself. The seven men who were saved saw this tragedy.

"Some of the Chinese officers brave men? Yes, I have said so. But the major part of them were Foo Chows. Those who were not Foo-Chow men were brave enough. The *Zsi Yuen* was manned largely by Foo-Chow men, and they made off at the very outset of the fight. We saw them going for Port Arthur at 12.45. Fong, the cowardly captain of the *Zsi Yuen*, afterwards said that his entire battery had been disabled at the very beginning of the engagement, and that he was obliged to make tracks to save his ship. But upon examination

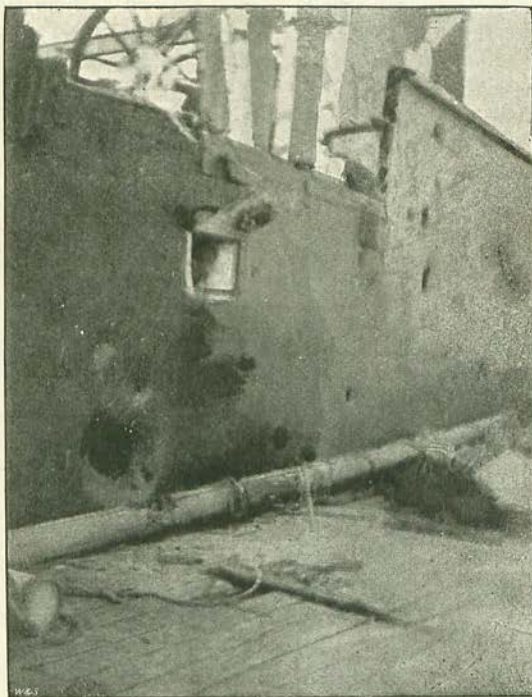
it was proved that this was the lamest of excuses, the only damage done to any part of his battery—and that not serious—having been received after he had turned tail!

"If it had not been for the war interrupting our work at Wei-Hai-Wei, we should soon have put a different complexion on the Chinese navy—as regards officers, I mean," said Captain M'Giffin. "We had the greatest hopes of the young men who would have graduated shortly. The gunnery school was especially good. As I have said, it was under the charge of Lieutenant Bouchier, of the British Navy. He was a splendid

gunnery officer himself, and took great interest in the work.

"The Japanese admiral, Ito, acknowledged our superior marksmanship; but it must be remembered that, on account of their large number of quick-firing guns and general numerical superiority, being twelve ships to our six during most of the engagement, we were much overmatched. As a matter of fact, though we secured about twenty hits out of 100 to their twelve, yet, as they could fire 600 shots to our 100, they made seventy-two hits to our twenty. Add to this that they had six targets to fire at and we twelve, and you will readily see our disadvantage.

"You would hardly believe," continued Captain M'Giffin, after a pause, "that while we were doing everything we could to make good sailors of our men, and good officers, and to encourage an *esprit de corps*, we were compelled to have with us a lot of men who did everything they could to mar all that we were doing. I refer to the secretaries that the officers are obliged to have about them to make their reports. Written Chinese is a difficult matter, and it is done by a class apart. These men are of the Mandarin



THE SUPERSTRUCTURE OF THE "CHEN YUEN" AFTER THE BATTLE.
From a Photograph.

class, and they have all their vices and nobody else's virtues. They are a mean, cowardly, and despicable set. They are, in short, an incarnation of all the Chinese vices, and as such they hang together, work together, and whenever they see anybody doing anything that is different to the old Chinese method, like wearing a uniform different to what they have been used to, or unlike their own garb, which is a long blue gown, learning drill, or anything of that kind, they stand by in groups, and point and sneer. They make remarks, too, telling them they are learning the habits of foreign devils, forgetting their Chinese origin,

and so forth. This has a bad effect upon the men, and discourages them greatly. Yet in a big ship we are obliged to have a lot of them—as many as twenty or twenty-five. When it came to fighting, or there was a possibility of fighting, these fellows suddenly became sick, or they found that it was necessary for them to go home to bury a father or a mother. It was astonishing the number of parents there were to be buried at such times. You never saw such filial piety—and poltroonery!

“One of these fellows,” continued M’Giffin, “when, just at the outbreak of the war, there was a prospect of a brush with the enemy, fell into such a funk that he pretended to be sick and asked leave to go home. The fleet was at the time in Corea, and his request was refused. Then he heard that one of the ships was ordered to return to China, and that she would sail in the morning. During the night, therefore, he managed, by bribing some sailors, to get on board, and hid himself away in the hold. But in the morning, when he ventured to show himself on deck, he found to his dismay that the rest of the fleet had sailed for home, while the ship he had taken refuge upon was ordered on another expedition. The poor secretary begged and prayed to be sent back, that he might bury his father or his mother. But that, of course, was out of the question, and he had perforce to accompany the ship. She did nothing, and got no hurt; but when, in a day or two, she returned to port, the cowardly, mangy secretary was so sick through fear that he was obliged to go home.

“This was one of the ways in which the Chinese were handicapped,” said Captain M’Giffin. “We had, in fact, hardly a chance. The Japanese had by far the best of it in every way. They had the advantage of

us in ships, and the majority of their guns would fire five or six shots to our one. Then their ships had greater speed; we made several attempts to ram them, but what was the good, when they could go seventeen knots an hour to our twelve? And yet, in spite of every drawback, if all the ships had been fought as well as the *Ting Yuen* and the *Chen Yuen*, we should have done for the Japs. They confessed that we two—that is, the two ironclads—preserved our formation throughout, and that the *Chen Yuen*, by her steadiness and excellent gun practice, saved the Chinese fleet from actual annihilation.

“And yet the Battle of Yalu was decisive enough in all conscience. It gave the Japanese absolute command of the sea. It was a splendid strategic victory, and they deserve all credit for it. The fight was not such a great affair as regards the force engaged, but it was, in the results obtained, one of the most momentous naval engagements of the century, and by long odds the most important of the Chino-Jap War.

“About the price put upon my head? It’s no use saying much about that. The Japs offered 5,000 yen—a yen is a dollar—for my capture. I don’t know why. I was not the only one for whom they were willing to pay a price—I suppose in order that they might wreak their vengeance upon us. However, if they had captured me, I don’t think they would have got much satisfaction out of me, for in the event I should not have had time to shoot myself, I always carried a small phial of prussic acid about with me for use in case of need.”

In conclusion, Captain M’Giffin said: “I am sorry I have not any better photographs to offer you. I had a kodak with me, and in the beginning of the fight I took seven or eight shots; but the film proved to be bad, and so I had my trouble for nothing.”



CAPTAIN M'GIFFIN AFTER THE BATTLE.
From a Photo. by Le Fong, Chefoo.