

Description of the Assault on Seringapatam on 4 May 1799 from Lieutenant Richard Bayly, *Diary of Colonel Bayly 12th Regiment :1796-103*. London: Army and Navy Co-Operative Society, 1896 pp. 92-94.

"... After a month's continual fighting and hardships, a breach was reported practicable on the 3rd of May, and the following day was appointed for the storm. Towards evening the troops selected on this interesting occasion moved slowly down to the trenches, under the command of Baird. For nights and days had the troops suffered from excess of fatigue, up to their knees in water, and exposed to the fierce rays of the sun, fired at and rocketted from every direction, and subjected to continual alarms. We were, therefore, all rejoiced at the speedy prospect of a glorious termination to our incessant sufferings, advancing with all that animation and buoyant spirit so characteristic of British soldiers on the eve of a brilliant attack. At one o'clock p.m., on the 4th inst., Baird, taking out his watch, exclaimed: "The time has expired!" and leaped on the parapet of the trenches, exclaiming in a loud voice: "Now, my brave boys, follow me!" The enemy were at this moment quietly intent on their culinary preparations for dinner, and we experienced little loss, until we were floundering on the rocky bed of the river, when the men began to fall fast. All who were wounded were inevitably drowned in a second afterwards. One step the water scarcely covered the foot; the next we were plunged headlong into an abyss of fathoms deep. Thus scrambling over, the column at length reached the ascent of the breach, where numerous flankers who had preceded us were lying stretched on their backs, killed and wounded, some of the gallant officers waving their swords and cheering our men on. We dashed forward, and the top of the breach was soon crowned by our intrepid lads, and the British flag hoisted. But this was for a moment only. A sudden, sweeping fire from the inner wall came like a lightning blast, and exterminated the living mass. Others crowded from behind, and again the flag was planted. At this time General Baird was discovered on the ramparts. On observing a deep, dry, rocky ditch of sixty feet deep, and an inner wall covered with the troops of the enemy, he exclaimed: "Good God! I did not expect this!" His presence of mind did not desert him; he gave his directions in those cool, decided terms that a great man in the hour of danger and emergency knows so intuitively how to assume, and we were soon charging to the right and left of the breach along the ramparts of the outer wall. In the left attack, Tippoo was himself defending the traverses with the best and bravest of his troops. This impediment caused a sudden halt, but my gallant friend Woodhall impetuously rushed down a rugged confined pathway into the ditch, and ascended the second or inner wall, by an equally difficult road, mounted to the summit, followed by his company, the Light Infantry of the 12th. Ere he attained a footing, he had clasped a tuft of grass with his left hand, and was on the point of surmounting the difficulty, when a fierce Mussulman, with a curved, glittering scimitar, made a stroke at his head, which completely cut the bearskin from his helmet, without further injury. Woodhall retaliated, separating the calf of the fellow's leg from the bone. He fell, and the gallant Light Bob was on the rampart in a moment, surrounded by a host of the enemy, whom, with the assistance of his company, he soon drove before him, thus relieving General Baird and his column on the outer wall from the destructive fire from the interior rampart, thereby

saving hundreds of lives. How far this deviation from orders can be justified may be subject for discussion, but a brave man does not often reflect on consequences, when assured that an energetic movement on his part will probably ensure a certain victory and the preservation of a multitude of his fellow-soldiers. Tippoo finding his troops fired on from the inner ramparts, hastened to the Sallyport. Here Woodhall and his men were already in the interior of the town, prepared for the *recontre*, and a sharp firing ensued. The gateway was filled to the very top of the arch with dead and dying. The column under Baird had pursued the flying enemy to the Sallyport, and whilst Woodhall was bayoneting and firing in the front, they were also attacked in the rear. The body of Tippoo was afterwards amongst this promiscuous heap of slain. Neither Woodhall nor his men obtained a single article of plunder on the occasion, but a private of the 74th Regiment secured a very valuable armlet, which was sold to Doctor Mein of that corps for a few hundred rupees. It was ultimately discovered to be worth seventy or eighty thousand pounds. The doctor purchased the man's discharge, and settled him in Scotland on £100 pension per annum. The fortress now became one wild scene of plunder and confusion, but poor Woodhall and his men were appointed to extinguish the flames of some burning houses in the vicinity of the grand magazine of gunpowder, which, had it ignited, would have blown the whole garrison, friends and foes, into the air. He performed this arduous duty effectually, and although first in the town, his company were the only part of the regiment who did not reap any pecuniary reward for such daring heroism. The rest of the troops had filled their muskets, caps, and pockets with zechins, pagodas, rupees, and ingots of gold. One of our grenadiers, by name Platt, deposited in my hands, to the amount of fifteen hundred pounds' worth of the precious metals, which in six months afterwards he had dissipated in drinking, horse-racing, cock-fighting, and gambling.

Tranquillity was scarcely restored in the Fort, when the honourable Colonel Wellesley was sent in to take the command, to the great dismay and indignation of General Baird, who had felicitated himself on the certain command of this acquisition of his gallantry; but he was superseded, and at once delivered over to Wellesley the important fortress of Seringapatam to his future guidance, who next day hung up eighteen poor Sepoys, found in the act of plunder, contrary to his orders..."