

Alan Tritton. *When the Tiger Fought the Thistle. The Tragedy of Colonel William Baillie of the Madras Army.* London: the Radcliffe Press, 2013. Appendices. Index. xx + 314 pp. ISBN 978-1780764375 (Hardback). Price £25.00.

Colonel William Baillie made a brief, dramatic appearance in the annals of British India's history. His brigade marched to rendezvous with the commander-in-chief of the Madras army as Sir Hector Munro prepared to resist Haidar Ali of Mysore's advance in September 1780. Baillie's force could not break through the Mysorean lines. Munro, instead of hastening to join Baillie, sent a detachment of 1000 troops under Colonel Fletcher to strengthen Baillie near Pollilur. There Baillie was crushed on 10 September. Of his 86 officers, 36 (including Fletcher) were killed or died of wounds and 34 were wounded. Eventually, Munro bestirred himself and marched to within four miles of the battle when Baillie had to yield to overwhelming odds. Munro's conduct and competence were excoriated in one of the more florid passages of John Fortescue's mammoth history of the British army.

Alan Tritton, who has done distinguished work over a long period on the preservation of British memorials in India, reviews Baillie's career in the broad context of the British penetration of eighteenth-century Madras. Reader of military history will inevitably focus on the battle of Pollilur. Tritton effectively recounts Baillie's wide-ranging operational movements in the ten months up to the battle, describes the battle itself, and reviews, with extensive quotations, contemporary accounts of the battle (pp. 218-70). This useful work stresses that Fletcher, an ambitious and self-confident officer, probably persuaded Munro to limit the reinforcements sent to Baillie so that he might enhance his own role and glory in what promised, in his eyes, to be a dazzling victory against a numerically superior enemy. This is a plausible assessment of the dynamics of command, though it is not intended to exonerate Munro from failing to concentrate at a decisive point.

Baillie's role in one of the largest British defeats in India was compounded by his treatment as a prisoner of war. The British captives suffered grievously from privations, indignities and humiliations. Denied medical attention, Baillie died in prison at Seringapatam in November 1782. Tritton, unfortunately, does not discuss the ways in which Baillie's fate was subsequently described or how it shaped late eighteenth-century and Victorian views of Haidar Ali and his son Tipu Sultan.

The bulk of Tritton's book interweaves an account of Baillie's life with a general history of British expansionism in Madras. For long stretches, the general history takes over. Tritton's writing is clear, lively, and engaging; the author seems to have enjoyed exploring the thorny interactions between frequently rapacious and corrupt East India Company officials and local rulers. But military operations and organization, apart from Pollilur, receive limited attention. Much of the material would interest general readers seeking an introduction to British official activities in Madras from the 1740s to the 1780s.

The original element is based on Baillie family papers. Unfortunately, however, the book has no footnotes, so that the precise location of the extensive quotations from these letters, and from published contemporary works, is elusive. Baillie did not write prolifically; his first letter to his mother came when his father died, after he had

been in India for twelve years. Nor did he provide any insight into India or its people. The new material is mostly about his career concerns and the distant running of the family's lands, which he inherited on his father's death in 1771. Baillie's own letters illustrate a familiar tension. The expatriate reluctantly stayed abroad – he never returned to Britain after arriving in India in 1760 – in order to gain financial security before the expected return home. Yet he created a parallel life, which included children by an Indian companion, unknown to his family in Scotland. One daughter survived, was sent in 1775 to England, never saw her father again, and yet returned to India, where she died in 1824, married to a British surgeon. Indeed one sub-theme is the emergence of a family diaspora, with other family members following Baillie to India.

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