

Excerpts from a Sergeant's Diary recounting Robert Clive's capture of Arcot, September-October 1751

"4th [September 1751] We marched towards Timmerie, a fort of no inconsiderable force in possession of the enemy, and about six miles distant from Arcot. About three in the afternoon the enemy's horse to the number of 500, & about 300 foot, made their appearance about a mile distant from us then on the march. Without hesitation we turned to the left, and as they advanced soon came near enough to cannonade, which they begun from one field piece on the left where their foot were posted. Capt. Clive ordered one of our field pieces to advance towards them under care of Lieut. Bulkley's platoon, and attacked their horse himself with the Seapoys. As they advanced upon the right, he soon put them to flight, as had Mr. Bulkley's platoon done the same on the left by advancing on their foot and cannon which they carried off precipitately & disappeared under cover of the rocky hills and some tops (sic) about a mile in their rear. Night coming on, we buried one [(sic) ? some] of their dead and returned to Arcot having had only one Seapoy wounded and [a] Camel killed. The loss sustained by the enemy could not be considerable., as they did not stand fire at proper distance, but several horses were seen without their riders."

"6th [September]. We again marched towards Timmerie, and as we came within a mile of the fort, upon a rising ground, saw the enemy (who had been considerably reinforced) drawn up in a top [tope] under the protection of the fort guns. We continued our march towards 'em, and as we came near they fired from two field pieces very briskly, and killed 3 of our Europeans. Mr. Bulkley was immediately ordered to dislodge them if possible, and take possession of the top which their men lay under cover of, a bank which made a good breast work for them. Notwithstanding which, the undaunted manner in which our people ran up to them intimidated them so much that they retired to the side of a tank, in front of the top and within musket shot of it. Being now under command of the fort guns, they fired very briskly upon us from the fort field pieces and musketry; from Tank (sic) we cannonaded them in the tank but with little execution, not more of a man to be seen than his head and musket. Captain Clive, finding our situation very disadvantageous, ordered the men under cover of a house, and ordered Mr. Glass's platoon with some Seapoys to go round upon the flank of the enemy, who no sooner made their appearance in flank but Mr. Bulkley advanced upon them in front, and put them to the rout without losing one man ; we immediately marched into the village adjoining the fort which they had left in flames. Several messages were interchanged, and we fired a few shot and Shells from the Houbitz but the fort being strong and well surrounded with a wet ditch (sic). As we could do nothing by bullying were sensible nothing could be attempted with hopes of success by force of arms, having no battering

cannon with us and our force short one platoon (left at Arcot) of the number brought out with us, we returned to Arcot in the Evening, attended great part of the way by the enemy's horse, who carefully avoided coming within cannon shot of us. We lost in this fray 3 Europeans, some blacks & whites; can't compute the loss of the Enemy."

"14th [September]. The enemy now being very strong ventured to encamp within 3 miles of Arcot, which we having intelligence of, about 12 at night marched out with 3 platoons & the Seapoys, observing the most profound silence, well knowing the success of a handfull of men against such numbers entirely depended on not being discovered. The attempt succeeded to wish, for unobserved we arrived in their camp and alarmed them by firing platoons. So great was their confusion that tho' we went through the middle of 'em they fired very few shot amongst us, & those few to no purpose. We made no stay, but returned to Arcot immediately. So privately was this affair conducted that the Inhabitants knowing nothing of our being out upon our return imagined it to be a reinforcement for the garrison. We can no otherwise judge of the enemy's loss than by the terrible shrieks and groans all over the camp. As our people were strictly order'd to keep their ranks less plunder was got than perhaps might have been expected from such an exploit. From this time till the 24th little worth notice happened, only as the enemy increased in numbers they did in audacity, now and then coming into the town and cutting our people, who for that reason were denied port liberty."

"16th Sept. Some stores being on the road from Madrass and having intelligence that the enemy had possessed themselves of Conjeveram Pagoda in order to intercept our communication Lieut[s]. Revel and Trenwith, with Ensign Dawson, one platoon, & some Seapoys and field pieces, were ordered to escort the stores. The enemy on their approach deserted the Pagoda and retired to Matchulavaum, 'a fort six miles distant. Captain Clive, somewhat dissatisfied with the proceedings of Lieut. Trenwith, on the 18th ordered Lieut: Bulkley with the rest of the garrison to march towards him, leaving only a few men besides the sick to take care of the fort. This party was joined [on] the 20th on the road by Lieut. Trenwith's and marched back for Arcot), ; But the men being fatigued they halted about six miles distant. The enemy sensible of the incapacity of the fort for a defence, came into the town and attacked the fort about ten at night, flushed with hopes of our non-resistance and of an insurrection amongst their friends within. The number of our men would not admit even of centries [sic] upon the proper posts round the walls, so that we were obliged to divide into parties and keep moving round. The enemy did little else but pop at us from the houses on the side of the ditch (by which we had 1 or 2 wounded) till about two o'clock when a great number of horse and foot came close up to the gate and were received by all the fire we had, and some Grenades, which put them into confusion and obliged them to retire, the horse riding over the foot. They then went to the other gate, called the back gate, but retired in the same manner, as we were apprized of the place they intended to attack by the hideous shouts and noise they made. They made no further attempts at the gates but kept a brisk fire all round our walls till six in the morning, when Lieut. Bulkley appearing on the banks of the river they betook themselves to flight. Our men saw several dead in the streets, and brought in some prisoners and near 300 Cattle which they picked up in their march.

"This attack of the enemy with small arms and horse against stone walls may seem trifling, but we look upon it in a different light, there being above 2000 men in the fort, every one of them attached to Chawndas interest, and willing to cut our throats had not their dastardly spirits hindered them from the attempt."

[24 Sept.] "Captain Clive with the whole garrison sallied forth, only a few left in the fort. The enemy began firing on us before we had got 50 yards from the gate, but we kept so brisk a fire from our musketry & fieldpieces with grape as obliged them to retire into the palace and houses, from whence they kept a continual fire, wounding many of our people. The only people of theirs remaining in the street were the french artillery who played their guns upon us with great execution. Our people got into a Choultry which proved a good shelter from the enemy's shot. Our train by this time had advanced their foremost gun within ten yards of the Enemy's two and obliged them to desert them (having killed most of the gunners) upon which Capt. Clive ordered Lieut. Tre[n]with's platoon to bring off the guns, but the men not showing the greatest readiness, and the loss it must necessarily be attended with, made us decline it as the taking of guns is at best but a nominal victory and dearly purchased by the loss of even a few Europeans where they are so scarce. Lieut. Glass with his platoon was stationed at a street on the other side of the palace and was ordered to come upon the enemy's rear, but by some mistake the orders miscarried. The enemy, not a man of 'em to be seen in the street, & their shot falling in great quantities, was the only reason we had to think they were not gone, for they were all in the palace and house windows under cover. How to retreat now became the question, and as the doing it in a regular manner must have been attended with the loss of many, Captain Clive ordered the field pieces to be fired till they ran back to the corner of a street when the men followed and carried them off. The loss on our side was very considerable, having a great number both Europeans and Blacks wounded, of which some afterwards died Viz: Lieut. Trenwith and some 1 or 2 of the train, besides blacks. The loss of the enemy must likewise be great, most of their Train being killed or wounded, as were a good many blacks by Mr. Glass, who ordered his platoon to fire over a wall into a square where 200 of them were."

"24th [September]. The enemy now in possession of the town hindered all manner of supplies of .provisions, cut off the communication for the waters coming into the fort, and we had nothing before our eyes but the dismal prospect of either being starved out by blockade or being obliged to stand a storm in case of their bringing battering cannon to make a breach, which the unshaken fortitude of our officers made us chearfully resolve upon rather than meanly to submit to any terms could be proposed us. Great were the disadvantages we laboured under from the mal situation & condition of the fort. The town houses close to the walls, the ditch in many places easily fordable and in some dry. The walls in many places tumbled down, and those standing ready to fall; the parapet afforded but little cover for our men. The bastions ill contrived and of no service till made so by the hard labour of our men who were constantly annoyed by the enemy's fire from the houses, whilst we could not see so much as one of them. The inhabitants gave us to understand the use of the water would be destructive to our men, and the hopes of fresh supplies entirely cut off, besides our quantity of ammunition far short of what would be judged sufficient for our defence.

"The enemy entirely surrounded our walls, placing their men in the houses upon the side of the ditch and kept a continual fire all round, so that our people could no sooner look over the parapet but they had a whole volley of small shot fired at them from the houses not thirty yards distant, by which we lost a good many men."

"7th October. When they dismounted one of our two eighteen pounders by the first shot they fired, which was the knowledge we had of their having battering cannon, and by another shot entirely disabled her, which gave them an opportunity to beat down the parapet and destroy our defences before we could have the other gun mounted to oppose them; however we had been provident enough to have fascines ready, with which we made a battery in the night and endeavoured to retaliate our misfortune by dismounting theirs, but our train Officer being ill of his wounds our shot were badly aimed and the enemy soon dismounted this gun likewise. The place of the wall they began to batter the stone-work was already tumbled down, so that they had little difficulty in making a breach, which Captain Clive being resolved to defend, endeavoured to raise with fascinery on the inside, and filling up with earth, ordering a deep trench to be dug that their design might be as difficult as possible. On the inside this trench was the whole length of the breach, which he made the best use of by taking down the upper part of its wall and leaving enough standing for a breast work for our men, supporting the roof on pillars for a protection from the weather, and kept a strong guard in it, at the same time ordering pickets to be drove on the ramparts at the ends of the breach to hinder the enemy's running along the curtain. And got one six pounder on the flank and two on the terras of a house in front.

"14th. The enemy kept so hot a fire from their cannon that they split their only 18 pounder, the rest being only 6s & 3s."

"24th [October]. They opened a Battery of 1.18, and 1.9 pounder on the S.W. of the fort. Our parapet being pretty good in this place, we drove them several times from their guns by our small arms, killing several of their gunners. But they by degrees beat down that defence and breached without any other opposition than from a 6 pounder we had mounted in a fascine battery on one of the Cavaliers, which they soon disabled, and made a practicable breach of forty yards wide. Our defences at this breach were contrived nearly in the same manner as at the other."

"We immediately marched towards them, and our advanced party came in sight of them about eight o'clock in the morning; we continued our march till near ten when Captain Clive ordered to halt in full sight of the enemy. This he did as well to refresh the men, who had marched most of the night as to wait the motions of the enemy (then 2 miles distant) who seemed on their march towards us. The place we encamped in was an eminence in front of which were Paddy fields reaching more than musket shot from the encampment. On the right flank was situate a village with a wet trench on one side of it. On the left flank was a Palmira top. Between the ,trench which ran down , by the side of the Paddy fields on the right was a hard road that would not admit of above six men abreast. We were soon satisfied the enemy intended to attack us, by their continuing to march in order of battle towards us, and began to be much pleased with the situation

Captain Clive had pitched upon, and more so when we found the numbers of the enemy so far exceed our expectations and that the Morrattoes had left at Arcot 1000 of their nominal three. At twelve at noon the enemy began cannonading out of distance. Upon which Captain Clive ordered a party of Seapoys to advance down the trench side on the right with a small pop gun. The three 6 pounders and Howbitz were on the eminence in rear of the Paddy fields. Behind them was a Tank in rear of which [were] posted the Europeans. On the left the Morrattoes advanced into the top as did the Enemy's horse the same.

"The enemy by continuing their march soon came near enough to cannonade at proper distance, which we returned to more purpose. The ground they were upon was a gradual descent, hard and channelly, which carried our shot a vast way. The Paddy fields in front buried their shot at once, so that they did little execution. Our advanced Seapoys at first retreated, but it was only to a Bank from behind which they kept the enemy from advancing that way. On the left the Morrattoes charged the Moor horse, but they being interlined with musketry the Morrattoes retreated, having a great aversion to small arms since their being surprized. Captain Clive observing that the warmth of our cannonadement made the enemy incline towards the top on the left, ordered Messrs. Bulkley and Morrice with three platoons and field piece over into the top, and Messrs. Dawson and Turner to advance on the right with one platoon to a little Choultry near where the Seapoys were. When Lieut. Bulkley and party arrived, very unluckily there were no shot with the gun, which as soon as Captain Clive got notice of, he ordered the party back to their ground, strictly charging the officer to march as slow as were he on a parade, which retreat, so far from appearing an advantage to the enemy, that they began to retire from the top leaving only their horse, imagining we intended to carry off their artillery and baggage by advancing to the right. The Moor horse now deserted by their foot, the Morrattoes at several different charges dislodged them from the top. Captain Clive observing the French advance behind a Choultry and fustrees [sic] ordered the Europeans with two of the 6 pounders to advance upon^o them, but they scattered and ran off in the greatest confusion. Their horse were retreated near a mile, and by sunset Capt. Clive with some Seapoys had drove them [into] three different Choultry's and a pagoda, where we encamped that night. About 60 yards distant from this pagoda was a very deep ditch naturally hollowed out by the declivity on each side and being difficult to transport our carriages over it together with the night coming made it certainly the most prudent step to halt, especially as had we attempted a pursuit we must have laboured under the same and greater disadvantages than the enemy did in attacking us, as they were by this time got over Aroni river the banks of which being very steep made it a difficult task to convey carriages and baggage, besides being under the cover of the fort. In the night the enemy betook themselves to flight leaving behind them most of their baggage some horses, and, it was said, two of their cannon, the carriages being broke in the engagement. Their flight was in a manner the most unguarded, for except the body of French there were not above 20 or 30 of them in one place, this gave the Morrattoes an opportunity of making a capture of many of their horses, Muskets and baggage. Themselves acknowledged to have got 200 Horses. We were well satisfied of many more, and the Braminy Kelledar of the fort assured us the Morrattoes had got 7000 gold Moors, Nazajines, fan[ams] and other things to the value of 40,000 Pagodas. The loss on our aide

killed and wounded did not exceed 10 or 12, And those only Topasses and Seapoys. That of the enemy was more numerous, and, by the report of deserters & the Braminy of the fort, was above 200 killed and wounded, of which were a good many French. We encamped between the fort and river and next day a great many of their Seapoys (almost a number equal to the whole of ours) offered their service to us. Those who had muskets we entertained, and dismissed the others. As we were informed the enemy had left most of their baggage in the fort we summoned the Braminy to deliver them up. But he denied our allegiance and we marched up to his gates and either by persuading him he had some horses & an Elephant of the enemy's, or by his fears, he came upon terms & sent us 15 horse, one Elephant and a bill for 2000 Rupees which I can't say whether accepted or not. It was Captain Clive's opinion we should go to Chittaput where the scattered remains of their army were collecting, but the Morrattoes would not stir that way, being of opinion little plunder was to be got where the french had been and Conjevaram being a rich place they advised and insisted on going to it, which we afterwards did, and after their having got every thing of value in the town and adjacent country deserted us in a most rascally manner.

" In the time of the engagement our Seapoys, excepting about 250, all were behind the horse on the left and into the village on the right."

From: Forrest, Sir George. *The Life of Lord Clive*. Vol. I. London: Cassell, 1918, 141-147, 155-157.