

B. A. 1ST YEAR IIND SEMESTER

IIND Part of Third Anglo-Mysore War

Medows' campaign, 1790

The plan of attack developed by Medows called for a two-pronged attack, with the main thrust against the Coimbatore district and a diversionary thrust into Mysore from the northeast. Cornwallis was unhappy with this plan, due in part to the lateness of the season (combat being much more difficult during the monsoon season), and the lengthy supply lines from Madras that the plan entailed. However, he was willing to give Medows the opportunity for independent command.

Medows moved out of Trichinopoly in late May. Hampered by weather and equipment problems, his progress was slow. He met little resistance, as Tipu had withdrawn his main forces to the Mysore highlands. On 21 July Medows entered Coimbatore unopposed, after having taken some of the smaller fortifications in the district by either abandonment or the immediate surrender of the garrison. His only opposition consisted of 4,000 cavalry under Sayed Sahib that Tipu had detached to observe and harass his operations; most of these were eventually driven across the Bhavani River by Medows' cavalry. Further strong points in the district fell, with Palghat and Dindigul requiring significant action to capture.

Although the campaign was successful in gaining complete control of the Coimbatore district, Medows had to divide his forces to hold it, with the largest detachments at Coimbatore, Palghat, and Sathyamangalam. The attack from Bengal, and a third from Bombay, were late in getting started when Tipu made his counterattack.

Tipu's counterattack

On 2 September, Tipu left Srirangapatnam at the head of a 40,000-man army. Descending the mountain passes beginning on 9 September, he began to move toward Sathyamangalam. While the 2,800-man garrison there withstood an initial assault from Tipu's force on 13 September, Captain John Floyd, the garrison commander, opted to withdraw. Under cover of night, they crossed the Bhavani and headed for Coimbatore. Tipu, slowed by heavy rains, sent 15,000 cavalry in pursuit. These eventually caught up and captured much of Floyd's baggage train, and continued to pursue the weary garrison. That evening, the full force of Tipu's army fell upon them as they camped at Cheyoor. A desperate stand by the infantry repulsed repeated assaults, and only the arrival of reinforcements sent by Medows rescued them.

Tipu then embarked on a campaign of harassing the British supply and communications, while screening the movements of his main force. In early November he successfully misled Medows, moving much of his army north to attack the smaller Bengal force. This force, about 9,000 men led by Colonel Maxwell, had reached Kaveripattinam and strongly fortified his position. Unable to penetrate the defences, Tipu withdrew to the south on 14 November after learning that Medows was on his trail again. Medows and Maxwell joined forces on 17 November, and pursued Tipu, who had decided to make a move toward Trichinopoly. Unable to do more than pillage the town before Medows arrived, Tipu then moved on to rampage through the Carnatic, destroying towns and seizing supplies as he went. He ended up at the French outpost at Pondicherry, where he attempted to interest the French in supporting his efforts against the British. As France was then in the early stages of its Revolution, these efforts were entirely unsuccessful. Medows at this point moved toward Madras, where he turned over command of his army to Lord Cornwallis.

British take the Malabar Coast

British forces succeeded in taking control of the Malabar Coast late in 1790. One force under Colonel Hartley gained a decisive victory at Calicut in December, while a second under Robert Abercrombie routed the Sultan at Cannanore a few days later.

Advance on Seringapatam

Cornwallis took over the main British army at Vellore on 29 January 1791. A week later he marched west, as if to pass through the Eastern Ghats at that point. This prompted Tipu to abandon Pondicherry and make haste for Bangalore, where he perceived his harem to be at some risk. Although Tipu placed defences on some of the passes, Cornwallis, after a number of feints, turned sharply north, and crossed the mountains at the Muglee Pass on 21 February against no opposition. He then continued to advance, against virtually no resistance, until he was very nearly before the gates of Bangalore on 5 March. Tipu had fortified the city and supplied the garrison, but he stayed with his main force on the outskirts of the British positions as Cornwallis began siege operations. After six weeks of siege, in which the British had to repeatedly beat off attacks and skirmishes from Tipu, they successfully stormed the citadel.

After securing Bangalore, Cornwallis turned his army north to meet a supply caravan and to affect a junction with the Nizam's army, which took place on 12 April about 80 miles north of Bangalore. Turning back toward Bangalore, Cornwallis found the Nizam's men to be noticeably unhelpful. He had hoped that the addition of native cavalry to the army would assist in offsetting Tipu's advantage in that quarter, but the Nizam's men, commanded by Teige Wunt, were interested in plunder and in living off the army's supplies instead of foraging and scouting against Tipu.

The British then embarked on a series of operations to secure most of the area around Bangalore before moving on to Seringapatam. When Cornwallis was seeking a ford at which to cross the Cauvery River, Tipu offered him battle at a ford near the village of Arakere. In the ensuing

battle on 15 May, Cornwallis flanked Tipu's position and drove him to retreat behind Seringapatam's walls. Since the Marathan forces were apparently not nearby, and it seemed unlikely that Abercromby would arrive with the Malabar forces, and his army was on the verge of starvation, Cornwallis then made the difficult decision on 22 May to destroy his siege train and retreat. Only three days later, the Maratha army arrived, Tipu having successfully prevented most of its messengers from reaching Cornwallis before then.

Cornwallis' retreat to Bangalore exposed the Coimbatore district to Tipu's forces. On 11 June, 2,000 Mysorean forces laid siege to Coimbatore. Lieutenant Chalmers, the garrison commander, ignored orders from Cornwallis to withdraw if attacked in force, and chose to fight, in spite of having less than 300 men and inferior gunpowder. His defence was spirited, and reinforcements from Palgautcherry prompted him to sortie and successfully take the defenders' supply train in August. Eight thousand more Mysoreans then arrived, but Chalmers held out until 6 November. In violation of the agreed terms of surrender Chalmers and his men were taken prisoner.

Result:

Among the preliminary terms that Cornwallis insisted on was the Tipu surrender two of his sons as hostages as a guarantee for his execution of the agreed terms. On 26 February his two young sons were formally delivered to Cornwallis amid great ceremony and gun salutes by both sides. Cornwallis, who was not interested in significantly extending the company's territory, or in turning most of Mysore over to the Mahrattas and Hyderabad, negotiated a division of one half of Mysorean territory, to be divided by the allies, in which the company's acquisition would improve its defences. He later wrote, "If we had taken Seringapatam and killed Tippoo, we must either have given that capital to the Marattas (a dangerous boon) or have set up some miserable pageant of our own, to be supported by the Company's troops and treasures, and to be plundered by its servants. The territories taken deprived Mysore of much of its coastline; Mysore was also obligated to pay some of the allied war costs.

Dr. O. P. Shukla
Department of Defence Studies
University Of Lucknow