

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK  
**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom  
**Band:** - (1932)  
**Heft:** 534  
  
**Artikel:** Swiss soldiers in Clive's army  
**Autor:** Latt, A.  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686632>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 10.07.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# SWISS SOLDIERS IN CLIVE'S ARMY.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE "BUND" 1925.

By Dr. A. LATT.

The birthday of Robert Clive may serve as a fitting occasion to remember for a moment the 600 odd Swiss officers and men who helped the Caesar of India to wrest that fair domain from the valiant Frenchman Dupleix and the Indian nabobs. English historians from the 18th to the 20th century are all agreed that the Swiss soldiers in the service of the East India Company belonged to the very backbone of Clive's little army, that they served England well and were ever true to their own motto: *Honneur et Fidélité*. Two Swiss officers may even be said to have been Clive's immediate instructors in the field. One of them, Captain Paradis, of Fribourg, served in the French army, whilst the other, Captain de Gingins, a Vaudois, commanded the little force in which Clive held his first commission as an army service captain. Neither Paradis nor Gingins seem to be remembered in their own country, and not a voice was raised when French historians claimed them as their own compatriots. We are therefore greatly indebted to the Hon. J. W. Fortescue and other British writers for their vindication of the merits of our brave old countrymen.

Captain Paradis was an engineer. He had gained the absolute confidence of Dupleix as much by his bravery and skill as by manifesting a violent opposition to Dupleix's rival de La Bourdonnais. Dupleix in compensation appointed him Governor of Madras and gave him the command of a little detachment which from Pondichery was to force its way to Madras. The men at first objected to the foreigner and the engineer, but a setback soon made them submit to a commander who was to lead them to victory and immortal glory. They were only 230 Europeans and 700 Sepoys with not a single gun, who, on November 4th, 1746, near St. Thomé, found themselves opposed by a splendid Indian army of the dreaded Maphuz Khan, numbering more than 10,000 men, with plenty of cavalry and a very powerful artillery in a well chosen and strongly fortified position on the banks of a deep river. Every other commander would have fallen back rather than try his luck against such dreadful odds. Not so Paradis, who felt himself able to supply any deficiency of his little army, being born with the qualities which no soldier can acquire—decision, of character, calmness and energy. "Now, after a century and a half of fighting in India," says Fortescue, "no British officer would be for a moment at a loss as to the course to be pursued, but Paradis had neither tradition nor experience to guide him. However, whether by intuition or from despair, he did exactly what he ought. Knowing the river to be fordable, he led his men without hesitation across it and straight upon the enemy, scrambled up the bank, gave them one volley, and charged with the bayonet. The effect of this bold attack was instantaneous." Within an hour's time the impregnable camp was lost and won. The Indians tried to make a stand behind new palisades and the walls of the town, but the French, always advancing in good order, and firing by sections as they did so, forced the enemy from all his positions. A small detachment coming up from the rear completed the rout.

"It was more than a century," writes Orme, the contemporary historian of that period, since any of the European nations had gained a decisive advantage in war against the officers of the great Moghul. The experience of former unsuccessful enterprises, and the scantiness of military abilities which prevailed in all the colonies, from a long disuse of arms, had persuaded them that the Moors were a brave and formidable enemy." Paradis broke this spell of timorous opinion by smashing an army with a single battalion. "It may well be asserted," writes Colonel Malleon in his 'History of the French in India,' that of all the decisive actions that have been fought in India, there is not one more memorable than this." The circumstance which stamps it as such is that it was the very first of its kind, that it proved, to the surprise of both parties, the overwhelming superiority of the European soldier to his Asiatic rival. It inaugurated a new area, it introduced a fresh order of things, it was the first step to the conquest of Hindustan by a European power. "Whether that power were French or English," says Malleon, "would depend upon the relative strength of the two nations, and even more on the character of the men by whom that strength should be put in action. The battle which introduced this change deserves, then, well to be remembered; and, in recalling it to our memories, let not us, who are English, forget that the merit of it is due, solely and entirely, to that great nation which fought with us the battle of empire on Indian soil, and did not win it." And what, one cannot help feeling on reading this chivalrous distribution of compliments, what about the little Swiss soldier who did the thing?—If we agree with Fortescue that the British had no tradition to guide them in such a situation, we might say that for a Swiss it was just the

kind of fight our ancestors liked best. Is it not in the tradition of Grandson, Morat, Dornach, and Novarra? "Of all the fruits of the long friendship which French and Swiss sealed with each other's blood in the furious struggle of Marignano," says the great historian of the English Army, "none is more remarkable than this (St. Thomé). The memory of Paradis should be honoured in England, since he taught us the secret of the conquest of India."

The first to learn the lesson of St. Thomé was Robert Clive himself, who, at the moment of the battle was a prisoner of war at Madras, and had ample time to occupy his mind with visions of conquest and empire, which appeared to him to offer a quicker road to fame and fortune than the toil of a clerk and trader. So far English and French had been nominally at peace in India. They were however busily intriguing under the cover of Indian nabobs and making preparations for the struggle which everybody felt to be imminent. Very much would, of course, depend on which side would be able to get the biggest number of recruits from Europe. With men like Paradis there could have been little doubt that Dupleix would have been successful, as he was the first in the field. But Paradis was killed near Oulgray before Pondichery, in an attack on some trenches held for the Indians by a handful of English officers and men. He fell when he was almost eye to eye with a young English ensign—Robert Clive again. The French reinforcements which arrived from Europe were of the worst description, "un ramassis de gueux, vils coquins—que 100 hommes devaient battre," wrote Dupleix himself on February 15th, 1753, and he repeated his demand for "600 Suisses par exemple, qui encadreraient bien les recrues."

Dupleix had to go without the Swiss, the English having secured them in the meantime. Captain de Gingins—Gingen, as the English call him—seems to have gone to India alone or with a British transport in 1750. Early in 1751 we find him commanding a detachment of Europeans and Indians which was to oppose the forces of Dupleix and Chunda Sahib. But Gingen's troops were worse even than the French. They would run away at the mere sight of the enemy. Their commander took infinite pains to hold them together and to turn these recruits into soldiers. He succeeded by dint of perseverance, by an example of personal bravery and integrity which shamed the cowards into discipline and inspired the brave with confidence in their leader. His best assistant in this work was the commissariat officer of the detachment—Captain Clive. In April 1751 Gingen was able to carry the fortified position of the French and Indians near Verdachelum, but in a new encounter, which took place in May near Valconda, on the road between Arcot and Trichinopoly, the English force suffered a defeat and was almost dispersed. Gingen fell upon Trichinopoly, where he shut himself up, whilst Clive got his first independent mission, which was to go to Madras, to form a new army there, and bring it up to the rescue of Pondichery. Gingen was in the meantime holding out bravely with his little force, whose morale had become decidedly better. "It was now," says Orme, "that the English began to be ashamed of having retreated before such an enemy; and judging, as usual, from events, to blame their commander for an excess of caution in his retreat, of which their own panics had been the principal cause, for Gingen was undoubtedly a man of courage and had seen much service in Europe. His prudence became absolutely necessary now, as the French had taken possession of posts in which they could do no harm to the town, but from which they could not be driven without great loss. He therefore determined to preserve his men, whilst the enemy fatigued their troops and exhausted their ammunition to no purpose." The situation was indeed extremely difficult. Food was scarce and there was such a lack of ammunition that every French shot and cannon ball was carefully collected. Once he was able to cut off a body of French dragoons by a successful ambushade, an event which made his men more impatient than ever. At last Clive arrived with the new army, with which, near Kaveripak, he had gained his first victory under conditions almost identical with those which had confronted Paradis at St. Thomé.

Whilst Captain Gingen's name disappears from the lists, a great deal is heard in Clive's and Lawrence's reports and memoirs about the Swiss companies which early in 1752 had landed on Indian soil. Sir Luke Schaub, a citizen of Basle, who had been George the First's ambassador at Versailles, had conducted the negotiations which led to the engagement by the East India Company of four companies of Swiss Infantry and two companies of artillery from the Protestant Cantons. The first or Grenadier Company, under the command of Captain Chabbert of Geneva, served under Lawrence in this first campaign. It made itself so much feared that Frenchman and Indian gave up all hope and disbanded when the grenadiers appeared (Cultr'n: Dupleix). And they seemed to be always present where and when they were most wanted. We need not be surprised when we learn that they suffered ter-

rible losses too, as is seen from the frequent change of commanders (Chabbert, Gaupp, Gürtler, Polier). The second company, commanded by Captain Henry Schaub of Basle, a nephew of Sir Luke, had the misfortune to be taken at sea before they could land. They made up for the time thus lost after their being set free in 1754. The third Swiss company, under Captain Paul Polier de Bottens seems to have replaced the grenadiers when that excellent corps was surprised whilst covering a convoy in 1754, and was destroyed to a man. The fourth company, under Captain Ziegler of Berne, was chiefly used in Bengal. The fate of the 5th and 6th companies, which are mentioned by some writers, and of the 2nd artillery company are not known, whilst the first company of artillery, under Captain Louis d'Illens of Lausanne, had as brilliant a record as the grenadiers.

From some letters of these officers we learn that the relations between the Swiss and their British comrades were most cordial. Whether it was this good fellowship or the fact that the Swiss companies could no longer be filled up that induced the authorities to merge the Swiss into English units in 1758, we cannot now decide. To one privilege however, the Swiss held fast wherever they served: They would not stand the indignity of bodily punishment, which was usual in the English armies even much later, and no Swiss soldier was to be court-martialled, except by judges of his own nationality.

Very much could be said about the fate and the deeds of valour of individual officers and men. Captain Polier, for instance, who at Seringham decided the issue of the battle and was given the command of a division, but being twice wounded had to pass it on to Captain Calliaud. Distinguished and wounded again and again he rose to the rank of Major General, and Governor of Fort St. George on the Coast of Coromandel. Captain Fischer distinguished himself at the taking of Machlipatanam, and there was quite a little band of young Basle officers (Schaub, Gaupp, Gürtler, de Beck, Wagner) who lived with each other in personal bravery and a rapid rise to higher commissions. They were far outdone, however, by their fellow citizen Daniel Frischmann, who having gone out to India as a private, returned after 18 years with the rank of a Colonel. He was indeed lucky to have come out of so many dangers and fevers as would beset a man in India. Most of his 600 comrades never returned. Nevertheless, they were followed by many hundred men only about 40 years later, when the Neuchâtel Regiment de Meuron passed from the Dutch service into that of Great Britain, and in the taking of Seringapatam won the praise of Wellington himself.

But that's another story. . . .

## Address of the Archbishop of Canterbury on the occasion of the National Service of Prayer for the Disarmament Conference in St. Paul's Cathedral.

"The civilised world is approaching one of the turning-points in its history. Beyond question the International Conference on Disarmament which is to meet at Geneva next February will be the most momentous assembly which has taken place since the Peace Conference at the end of the war. It has been truly said that 'its decisions will probably determine whether the ideals which underlie the League of Nations are to prevail or whether Europe is going to return to the old system of an armed balance of power which would be the certain prelude to another world war.' And who can doubt that in another world war civilisation itself might perish?"

"The claim of the old evil maxim 'If you wish for peace you must prepare for war' has been for ever shattered. The lesson of the Great War has been written large—literally in letters of blood—that great armaments can only lead to war. It is as certain as anything can be that it was the enormous growth of armaments and the sense of insecurity and fear which they caused which made the Great War inevitable. Most rightly, therefore, the nations, our own included, who signed the Covenant which is part of the Treaty of Paris declare that 'the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations.'"

"£200 A MINUTE."

"More than ten years have passed. Yet still, in spite of all the reductions achieved by the Naval Conferences at Washington and London, the level of armaments remains as high as ever. The world is spending on them no less than £2,000,000 a day and we in this country £200 a minute. Truly the time has come when a deliberate attempt must be made by international agreement to remove this intolerable burden, this continuing menace, from the peoples of the world."

"Let it not be forgotten that in this matter there lies upon the nations who signed the treaty of peace an obligation of honour. Here are its