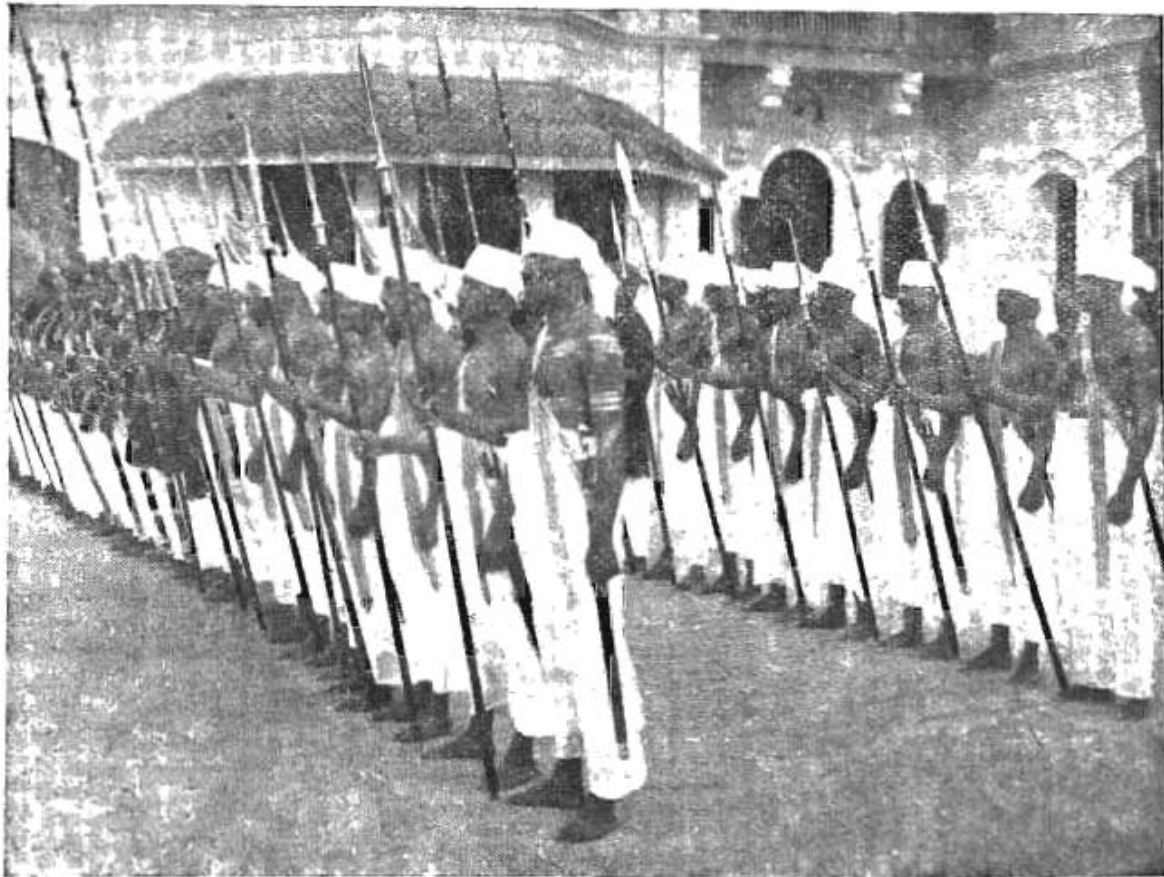


The Evolution of the Travancore State Forces.

By Major General V. N. PARAMESWARAN PILLAI,
General Officer Commanding, T. S. F.

TRAVANCORE has a hoary Military Tradition, of which any State can be proud. This history of its armed forces can be traced to the most ancient days of the Maha Bharata. For according to accepted tradition, the first Chera King, Perumchotudayan Cheralatan, is said to have taken part in the historic battle of Kurukshetra. His successor, Imayavaramban Nedumcheralatan seems to have won over the Kadambas, Yavanas and other formidable foes, and planted his flag on the Himalayas. Cheran Chenkuttavan

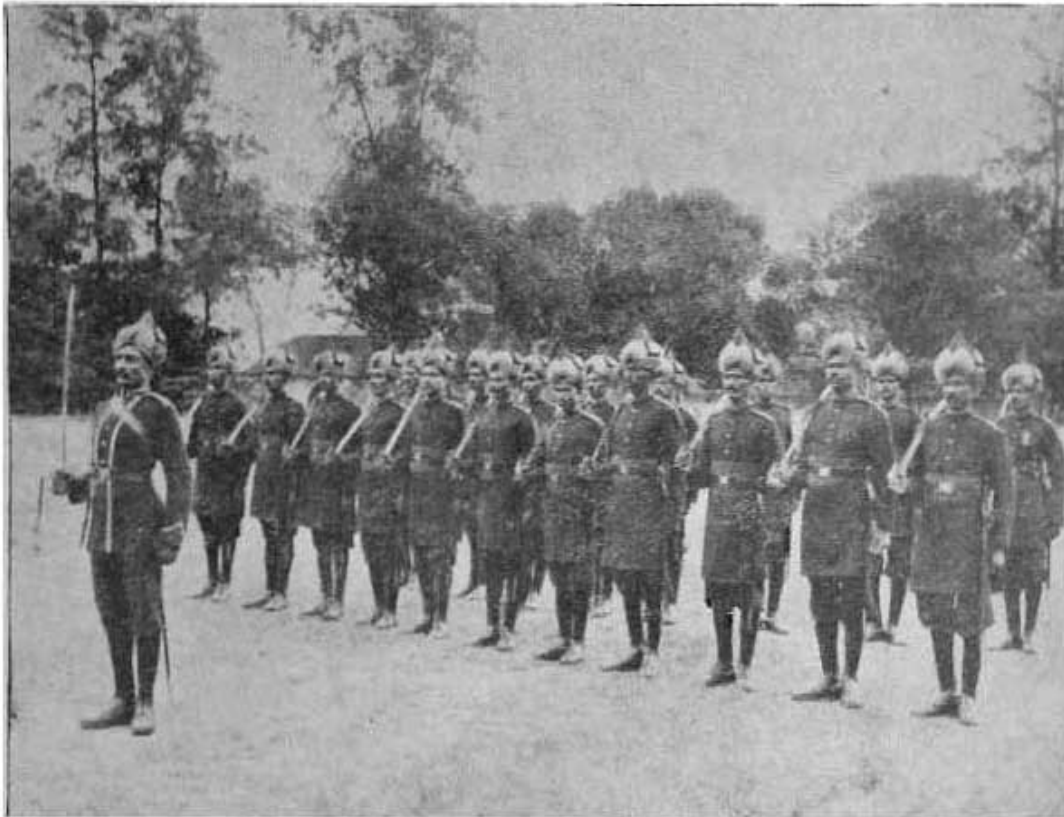
made extensive conquests from Cape Comorin to North India, and also had naval victories to his credit. The successors of Kulasekhara Alwar, the great Vishnu Bhakta and poet who ruled over Venad, kept the flame of this Military tradition alive. Till the end of the ninth Century, Travancore had to fight against the Pandyas and the Cholas, who often raided Nanjinad. By the 12th Century A. D. the Venad Kings had not merely brought Nanjinad under their sway, but had extended their power over a large part of the Tinnevely



Palace Guards in their traditional dress.

District also. Early in the 14th Century, the great King Ravi Varma Kulasekhara made Travancore the most powerful military State in South India. His triumphal march, through the Pandya and Chola dominions, and his coronation in 1313 A. D. at Kauchi, as emperor of South India, were all military achievements. In the 16th century, Travancore had to fight the forces of the great South Indian Empire of Vijayanagar on two occasions; and on both the occasions, the Badaga troops had to return disappointed. The Nayaks of Madura, who on the decline of Vijayanagar, declared their independence, also tried several times, to wrest the southern districts of Travancore from her rulers, but were forced to beat retreat every time. The Nayars who formed the largest section of

the people, were from the earliest days, organised in villages, each with its own 'Kalary'. These were fencing schools where every young man learnt discipline and underwent elaborate training in arms. Having learnt all the eighteen *atavus* known at the time, in these 'training centres,' the young men of Travancore waited only for occasions to be called to colours, to do their mite for the King and the State. There is authentic evidence to show that, in the war against Vijayanagar, the Maharaja was able to put on the field no less than 60,000 archers and 20,000 horsemen. Thousands of valiant and loyal youngmen formed what was called 'Chavettupada' similar to the Japanese Suicide Squad, and took a vow to defend the person of the King to a man: and there were



Artillery as it was.



A Military Parade in 1902.

others, called 'Amohas' who, upon solemn oath, vowed vengeance upon individuals for injuries done to the King and fulfilled such vows with intrepidity and tenacity.

First Regular Standing Army

To the great Maharaja Sree Veera Marthanda Varma, the well-known "Maker of Modern Travancore" goes, however, the credit of organising, out of this indigenous militia, a regular standing army. His regular army numbered over 50,000 trained men, and comprised Infantry, Cavalry and Artillery divisions. D'Lannoy, a Fleming Captain, who was taken prisoner by the Travancore Army, trained them after the latest European model. There were European, Anglo-Indian, Sikh, Pathan and Nayar Commanders in this army. Marthanda Varma Maharaja established

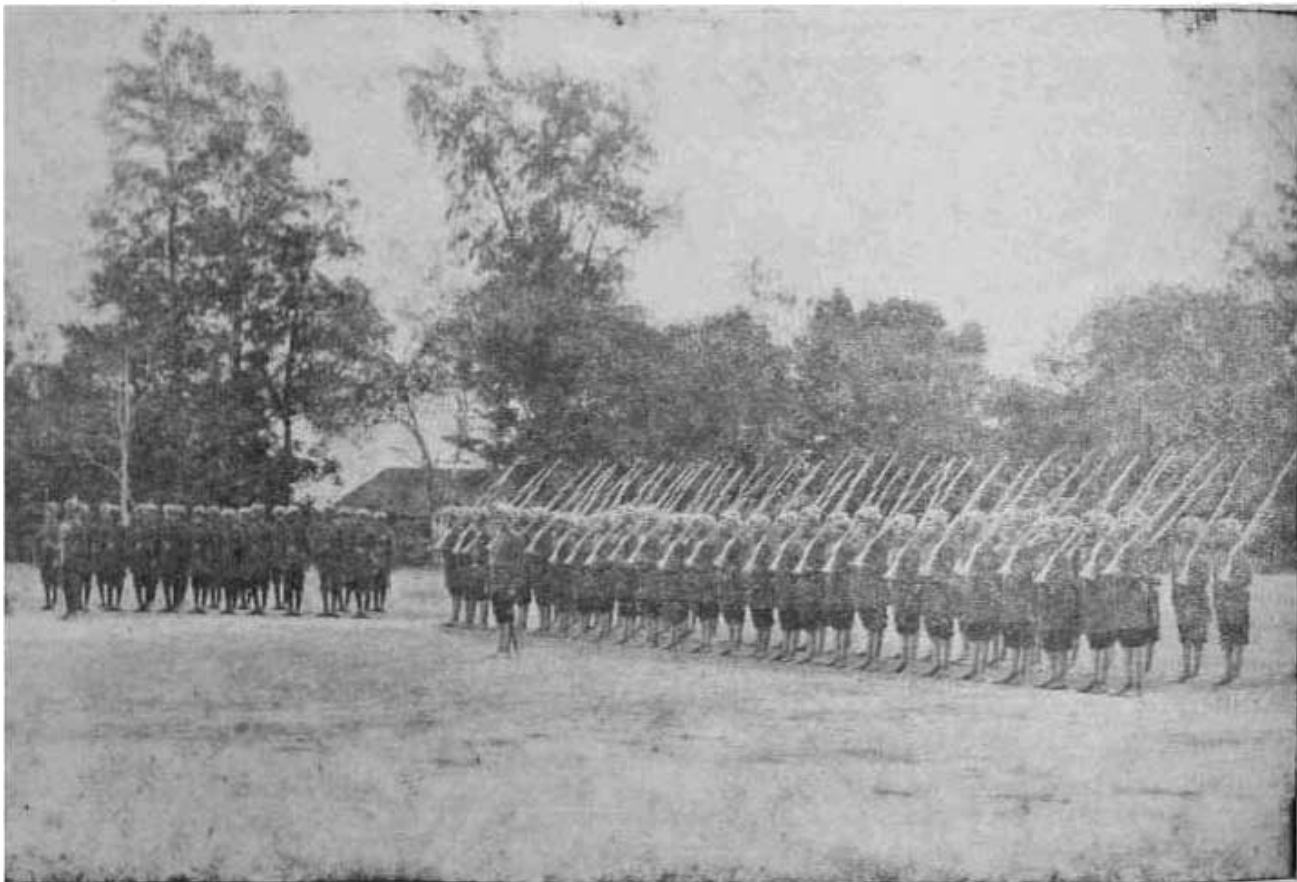
a foundry at Udayagiri, for the manufacture of guns, mortars, cannon balls and gunpowder.

The soldiers of Marthanda Varma Maharaja were mostly Nairs; but Mussalmans, Ezhavas and Nadars also used to be enlisted as and when necessary. After the conquest of the Northern tracts in the State Christians also were taken into service on certain occasions. The army was divided into regiments and battalions; and garrisons were posted at several strategic places, when new lands were annexed. The chief cantonment stations however, were Trivandrum, Padmanabhapuram and Quilon. The Army of Maharaja Marthanda Varma which conquered the whole of what today forms the State of Travancore, and crushed the power of the Dutch in the coast of

Malabar, was composed entirely of Travancoreans. The Marava mercenaries who were in the employ of the State, were disbanded. It was exclusively with the State's own manpower, that the Maharaja so successfully defended the State from the onslaught of the Dutch. Actually, he declined to accept the help volunteered by the English; and, the Maharaja's confidence in his strength was fully justified by the events which followed. In the fight against Kottarakara whom the Dutch propped up, not one Dutch soldier was spared alive; and in the battle of Colachel, Dalava Ramayyan's cavalry charge created such dismay in the Dutch ranks, that it ended in a rout in which most of the foes were taken prisoners. The battle of Colachel struck the knell of the Dutch ambitions in Malabar, and, followed by their defeat at Kayamkulam the next year, it resulted

in their abject submission before the might of the Maharaja, at Mavelikara.

The achievements of the Travancore Army in the days of Marthanda Varma did not end with the annexation of the neighbouring principalities. The ruler of Cochin and the Zamorin of Calicut were both defeated in the north; and, in the east; the troops of the Nawab of the Carnatic under Maphuse Khan, were driven out of Kalakad. The invincible army of Maharaja Marthanda Varma thus played its great part not only within the State, but also outside. However, it was during the time of Dharma Raja, his renowned successor, that the State Army's prowess was felt in the fullest measure, by the powers outside Travancore. The Zamorin was thoroughly defeated by the great General Ayyappan Marthanda Pillai; and Tippu's troops were shattered by Raja



On Parade in full dress as they were.



H. H. THE MAHARAJA'S BODYGUARD TODAY.

Kesava Das, unaided by the English troops which had been brought in, by agreement. A portion of the Travancore Army chased Tippu out of the State, and was engaged with the British troops under Lord Cornwallis, in his operations against Tippu. British recognition of the efficiency and valour of the Travancore Army thus dates back to the treaty of 1795 laying down that, between Travancore and the British there should be reciprocal military aid during wars. Thus did this State become a standing ally of the British.

The Nayar Brigade

After nearly a quarter of a century comparative lull, Col. Munro, in 1818,

increased the strength and efficiency of the State Army, and put a British Officer in Command. Captain McLood who was already in the service of Rani Parvathi Bayi as the Commander of the Rani's escort of cavalry, was chosen to the post. He reorganised the old regiment as the First Battalion, raised a Second Battalion by voluntary enlistment, and also formed a detachment of Artillery with brass six-pounder Guns for firing salutes. British Officers were generously trusted with Maharaja's commission and appointed to command the two battalions. The strength of the two battalions was soon increased to 1000 each, and each battalion was divided into 10 companies, each under a

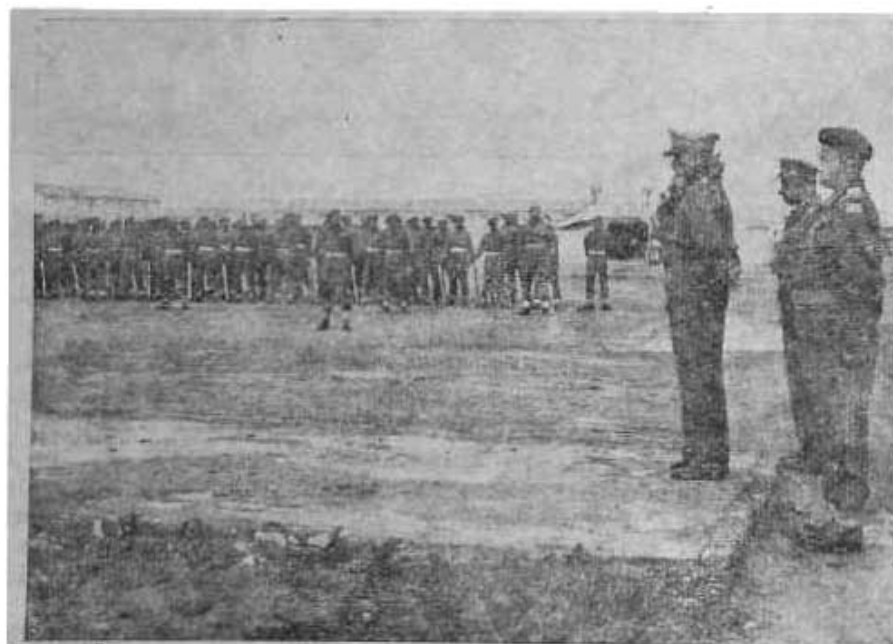
Travancorean Subadar. With the Artillery and the attached personnel, the total strength numbered about 2,350 in 1820. The duty of this force, which was officially called the 'Nayar Brigade', at the time of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal, was mainly policing. They were employed in guarding prisons, and prisoners in transit, in preventing smuggling, in seizing robbers and criminals, in assisting the civil officers in the collection of revenue and in the conduct of Temple festivals. Such employment of the Brigade for civil duties, however, led to serious inconvenience in actual working; and in 1824, a separate Police Force was organised. By a process of weeding out and selection, the Brigade was brought in into 2 Battalions to a total strength of about 1,750 by the year 1830. The Officer Commanding the Brigade was invariably a Captain of the British Service, elevated to the rank of a Major by His Highness the Maharaja, and his monthly salary was Rs. 1,000 while Battalion Commanders were Lieutenants commissioned locally as Captains, on a salary of Rs. 400 a month. In 1875, a graduated system of pay was introduced, rising from Rs. 5½ to 6½ in the

course of 21 years for sepoy, and in 1894, it was revised and enhanced by half-a-rupee. You may wonder at those ludicrously small salaries; but, in a sense, the men were only part-time employees, and could live under their own roofs, looking after their household and cultivation operations, except when called for drill or duties.

The State Forces

The Military Department was further reorganised in the early days of His Highness Sri Mulam Thirunal—1 Battalion of regulars, 1 Battalion of irregulars, 2 troops of Body-Guard, an Artillery of 4 Batteries and a Brigade Band. New lines were constructed at Pangode. The general efficiency of the troops was greatly improved. However, it was not until His Most Gracious Highness Sri Chitra Thirunal, our beloved Maharaja, ascended the throne, that any idea of resuscitating the State Army as a fighting force, was seriously thought of. In 1936, Travancore joined the Indian State Forces Scheme; and the original Nayar Brigade was reorganised as "The Travancore State Forces", with 3 units, called respectively the 1st, the 2nd and the 3rd Nayar Infantry,

and C class Units of 2 troops of Body-Guard, an Artillery of 4 Batteries and a State Forces Band. The Pangode Military Area was greatly extended, and the Headquarters of the Army was transferred, from the Old Cantonment to Pangode. Up to-date barracks were built, in large numbers, to suit the different ranks. The standard of training was greatly improved. The pay and conditions of service, were revised and improved. His Highness the Maharaja condescended to assume the title of



The G. O. C. is here seen addressing the Second Travancore Infantry at Baghdad.

Colonel-in-Chief of the Forces, and His Highness the Elaya Raja became Honorary Lieut. Col. of His Highness the Maharaja's Body Guard. Gentlemen Cadets were selected from educated young men of respectable families in the State, with the approval of His Highness the Maharaja. After thorough training they were commissioned as State Officers, corresponding to the King's Commissioned Officers of the Indian Army. The greatest reform was the throwing open of the enlistment of the State Forces, to all sections of His Highness the Maharaja's subjects, which laid the foundation for perfect comradeship between the members of the different communities in the State.

Travancore Army & The World Wars

When the War broke out in 1939, His Highness the Maharaja placed the State Forces at the disposal of His Majesty

was inaugurated for recruitment and basic training, for furnishing reinforcements to the two State Units on war service. The service rendered by the Training Centre and by the two Infantry Units outside the State, has been unequivocally praised by the most eminent authorities of the Indian Army. Today from the top to the bottom, the Travancore State Forces is entirely Travancorean. There are now 2 A Class Infantry Units together numbering 2004, 3 B-Class half battalions together numbering 1234, and 3 C-Class Units together numbering 1877. On the whole there are at present 62 State Officers, 73 Indian Officers and 3270 other Ranks. Under the gracious patronage, immediate guidance and inspiring command of His Gracious Highness the Maharaja, the Colonel-in-Chief, whose personal example and solicitude for the welfare of the State Forces, afford the fountain head of inspiration for



A Section of the modernised State Forces, on Parade.

the King Emperor of India, and before long, the 1st and 2nd Infantry Battalions were called to active service. At Pangode a new 4th Infantry was formed to do guard and ceremonial duties, a Training Centre

the best service for the motherland, the Travancore State Forces has attained a very high order of efficiency among the fighting forces of India.

—(Broadcast Talk from Trivandrum Radio.)