Lieutenant-Colonel Everard Ferguson Calthrop (1876–1915)

SEBASTIAN DOBSON

INTRODUCTION

The impact of the First World War on Anglo-Japanese relations has been examined in its broad political sense but not so much in human terms. The death of Lieutenant-Colonel Everard Calthrop on the Western Front on 19 December 1915 cut short a career which had already done much to increase mutual awareness between the British and Japanese armies since the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902. Among the hundred-odd officers the British Army sent to Japan between 1903 and 1940 to learn the Japanese language, and among the British military attachés in Tokyo drawn from their ranks after 1911, Calthrop occupies a unique place. ‘Few had penetrated so deeply below the hard-frozen and unyielding surface of Japanese social life’, wrote one of Calthrop’s successors, Major-General F.S.G Piggott.1 ‘No other officer amassed more knowledge of, or had more sympathy with, the Japanese; some had the knowledge without the sympathy and some the sympathy without the knowledge.’ Calthrop’s
service in Japan as a Language Officer (1904–08) and military attaché (1914–15) brought him into close contact with the Japanese army; his death at the end of 1915 was mourned as much in Japan as it was in Britain.

**EARLY YEARS**

Everard Ferguson Calthrop was born in London on 9 April 1876, the elder of two children born to Claude Andrew Calthrop and his wife Louisa. Claude Calthrop came from a family of gentlemen farmers in Lincolnshire, but he and his brother John had forged successful artistic careers in London, the former as a popular painter who occasionally exhibited at the Royal Academy and the latter as a well-known character actor on the London stage. One family member would later recall the ‘very sporty, large checked manner’ of Claude Calthorp’s dress and his frequent preoccupation with ‘one or another religion’.

Everard grew up in an unconventional household, where, according to his cousin, the author and artist Dion Clayton Calthrop, ‘there was great kindness and the atmosphere of Art’. The family home in Hammersmith overlooked the Thames, and friends and family would assemble each year in its glass-covered verandah to watch the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race. Everard followed family tradition in receiving his education at St. Paul’s School. He was a dayboy and was thus spared the torments his father had suffered there thirty years earlier as a boarder. Until he left St. Paul’s in 1893, Calthrop lived with his family, and for the remainder of his life he had a close relationship with his widowed mother and his younger sister, Hope.

By all accounts, Calthrop combined eccentricity with an artistic streak. His cousin described him as ‘one of the most original and brilliant people I have ever met, a wonderful linguist, a fine draughtsman and with a charming eccentricity’. The illustrator Ernest Shepard believed that he ‘would certainly have made his name as an artist’ while a later colleague described him as ‘artistic to the fingertips’. Calthrop won several of the art prizes at St. Paul’s, and the school magazine commended his work as ‘an instance of the varied excellence which one boy attains in the Art School’.

Calthrop’s choice of the army as a profession was therefore an odd one. The family itself had no military tradition (the closest military connection was an uncle who had married a grand-niece of the Duke of Wellington). Having grown up in an eccentric household, it was almost an act of rebellion to choose such a conservative profession. ‘I always wondered why he chose the army as a profession’, one friend, Archibald Wavell, the future Field Marshal and Viceroy of India, wrote later, ‘but he was a good soldier’. One explanation may lie in the