

A FEAST OF FASCINATION

Henry Dallal has been in India photographing the 61st Cavalry, still a major force in polo

The sheer number of horses, with their mounted soldiers, regally splendid, golden turbans and cummerbands, resonated an excellence and a discipline nurtured ever since the heyday of the British Raj. They welcomed me on my first visit to the 61st Cavalry headquarters in Jaipur, home to one of the last active mounted regiments in the world.

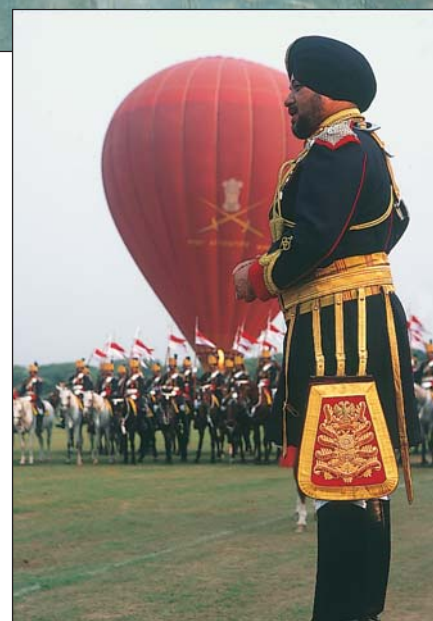
I was very happy to accept Commanding Officer Colonel Pinka Virk's generous invitation to witness one of the largest cavalry reviews in decades,

arranged for the Chief of Army Staff's Conclave. After all, it would be a good opportunity for me to have an insight into the fascinating world of the 61st Cavalry, following the publication of *Pageantry and Performance*, an intimate study into Britain's Household Cavalry, providing a feast and fascination to feed my passion for photography, horses and different cultures.

The armada of nearly three hundred disciplined four-legged soldiers, with their mounted professionals, marched past, images of them on active service



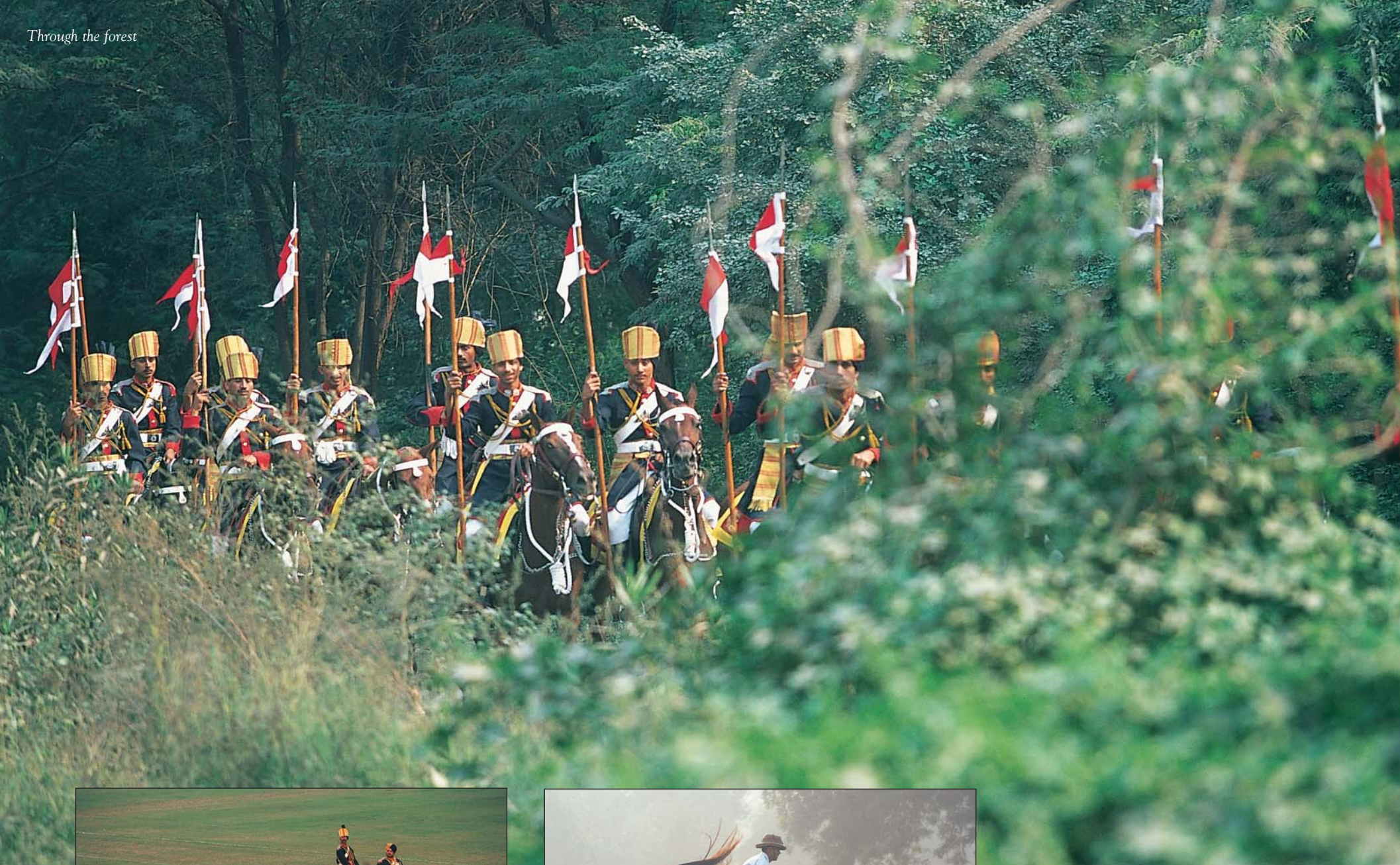
On parade



Colonel Pinka Virk



A study in affection



Regimental trumpeter



Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw takes the salute



Bucking



Walking away, early morning



A show case for the Army



61st Cavalry buckle

flashing through my mind. They are one of the last few remaining armies in the world that still use horses on active military duty patrolling India's borders. Most officers engage in other theatres, including the Siachen glacier, highest battlegrounds in the world at 20,000ft within the Himalayas.

All are keen horsemen. The captains are like kings on horses when it comes to polo, eventing and other equestrian sports. The 61st Cavalry polo team predominates in most of the tournaments played during the Indian season, and they also participate in the Indian Army

team, which regularly visits Europe and the USA.

The Indian Army team last played the British Army at Guards, in front of the Queen, in 1996 and it is hoped that a return game can be arranged soon. They also took part in the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations, just a year before celebrating their own golden jubilee.

They are also invited annually to play polo in Leh, reverting to an earlier version of the game where fewer rules apply and it is played in much higher altitudes in the Himalaya foothills.

Spending time in barracks with the soldiers and horses was a colourful experience for me. I was most impressed with the discipline and the efficient speed at which three hundred horses were prepared, and then with their mounted soldiers marched off with precision through the streets of Delhi onto the parade ground, with minimum shouts and orders.

It seemed every man and horse knew exactly what to do and when to do it, to orchestrate a beautiful display. They have kept religiously the high standards and traditions passed down over the years. I even spotted bugles dating back to the

early nineteenth century.

During the high noon of the British Raj, the Indian Cavalry, like many other British-Indian institutions, was a happy amalgamation of eastern and western systems and values. Famously resilient throughout the decades, the 61st Cavalry was formed as an amalgamation of the different private armies from the princely states after independence, principally in Rajasthan.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was inspired to retain a mounted cavalry unit within the Indian Army, and brought together the remnants of the

grand old state regiments of horse cavalry, merging them into the 61st.

The regiment has kept alive one of the most colourful and inspirational traditions of the Indian Army in fast-changing times. It is a show case of the army and any country would be proud to have such a professional and magnificent set-up.

Henry Dallal, a keen horseman, has created a vast collection of images depicting the spirit of British pageantry. His work has been exhibited in venues including the

Smithsonian Institute and Naples Museum of Art, and he was invited to project images from his book, *Pageantry and Performance, the Household Cavalry in a Celebration of Pictures*, as a son et lumiere on the walls within Windsor Castle. He was awarded Best View of Britain at 6am by BBC Radio 4/Today programme, and the Royal Mail is using images from his book in a mint stamp collector's pack, to be released in June to commemorate *Trooping the Colour*. With Major General Sir Evelyn Webb Carter, he has just returned from retracing the footsteps of Lawrence of Arabia, on horseback through Jordan.