

Ashok Nath. *Izzat - Historical Records and Iconography of Indian Cavalry Regiments 1750-2007*. Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, United Service Institution of India, New Delhi, 2008. 828 + x pp. (ISBN 978-81-902097-7-9), £85.00 / Rs 6000. Review by **MAJOR SATISH KHANNA** (Retd).

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Most historians harbour the hope that some day they will write a book of true significance and lasting importance. Unfortunately, for a multitude of reasons, few ever realise that dream. One who recently has more than achieved this goal is Captain Ashok Nath, a former cavalry officer of the Indian Army and an authority on the history of the Indian Army. Currently researching at the Department of History, Stockholm University in Sweden, he also holds the position of Senior Research Fellow at the United Service Institution of India.

Over the past twenty years he has meticulously researched the contents, much of it previously unavailable, which form the many chapters of this important book dealing with every cavalry regiment of India and Pakistan from 1750-2007. Over 2000 excellent images are illustrative of the depth of his work.

The enormous value of this research will become quickly apparent to those who use his work. Similarly, those who appreciate thorough and careful research will thank the author for the number of years he spent in putting it together.

The book concentrates foremost on a previously neglected subject; the regimental symbol or badge or as the author appropriately calls it 'Regimental Iconography'. The book also concentrates on the complex lineages of the many regiments, their ethnic compositions and battle honours. A comprehensive mass of information is arranged in an orderly manner for easy access under three sections covering the periods 1750 to 1921, 1921 to 1947 and 1947 to 2007.

Supplementary to this, but vital to an understanding of the subject, there are chapters that explore the evolution of the mounted arm on the Indian subcontinent, policies relating to ethnography and recruitment, the volunteer movement, the Auxiliary Force (India) Cavalry and forces of the Indian Princely States that were ultimately absorbed into the Indian Armoured Corps. A detailed bibliography has been provided for further research.

A thought provoking analysis on one of the historical reasons never thought of previously by historians appears on pages 6 & 7 of IZZAT and is reproduced below:

*'Eighteen fifty-seven has had some far reaching consequences. The post 1857 Army reforms brought about the segregation of Hindus and Muslims within the regiment. Earlier Muslims and Hindus served together down to the troop level and were not segregated into different squadrons. Those who had supported the Revolt were uprooted and this affected much of the Muslim elite, which comprised the nobility and middle class in what is now Uttar Pradesh and North Bihar. It was from this very area that eventually the call for a separate homeland for the Muslims was heard, which later culminated into the partition of India in 1947.'*

It is for the first time that many old cavalry units have been identified and their existence has been acknowledged with what ever details have come to light including on units disbanded and on units no longer in existence.

Such a book comes out rarely and hence the work is a great contribution. It will not only be useful to regiments of the armoured corps but also to serious South Asian military buffs and equally to scholars and researchers of military history.

South Asian historians and the Indian Army in particular, together must owe Captain Ashok Nath an enormous debt of gratitude for creating a masterpiece of historical literature which will serve its readers well for generations to come.

The author has been brave enough to point out an aberration regarding the seniority of an old cavalry regiment while explaining the basis for the same.

With regard to information on cavalry regiments of the Pakistan army, the author has gone to great pains to procure information from various sources (including former Rimcollians of the Pakistan army) despite the fact that procuring information was not easy in that Country. Being the son of a former Piffer officer, he was able to travel to Pakistan to complete the portion dealing with regiments in that Country. United Service Institution of India must be complimented for providing the required assistance.

The book is highly recommended as a vital source of information for serious students of Indian military history; a must for every armoured corps unit regimental library, the Armoured Corps Centre & School, Directorate General of Mechanised Forces and to every training establishment where officers of the Indian Army are imparted knowledge. Finally, it is a must for the Historical Section of the Ministry of Defence.

Readers of this research work would be indebted to the United Service Institution for instituting such an inspiring subject for research and seeing its completion through Captain Ashok Nath who had the honour to serve a few years in the Armoured Corps.

This book will encourage further research on military history through Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research at the USI.

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