

India ceremoniously celebrates Republic Day

On January 26, I had the honor of witnessing the most spectacular military tattoo imaginable. The official name of the ceremony was the "Beating of the Retreat". This ceremony put an official end to the week long celebrations in honor of India's 37th Republic Day.

From the raising of the flag of India in the centre of the parade ground, to the final bugle, it was a ceremony of true pomp & splendor. The combined tri-military and police force officers riding in brightly painted & shining jeeps, preceded the mounted cavalry of lancers which formed the honor guard of Zial Singh, the president of India. Zial Singh arrived in an open gilt carriage drawn by six perfectly matched horses. Most likely used by the British Viceroy in the days of the British Raj. The carriage was topped by a gaily colored, typically Indian umbrella.

Even the usually simple ceremony of flag raising became a special event when, as the orange, white and green flag unfurled, hundreds of beautiful rose petals floated down to the pavement. Then the more than 1,500 invited guests, adults & children alike, rose for the playing of India's national anthem by a military brass band.

The ceremonies were held on the enormous parade ground between the beautiful buildings built by the British that make up India's houses

of parliament. As the buildings are situated a little higher than the parade ground, the parade route takes on the look of the royal mile that stretches down from the Edinburgh castle to Holyrood house. As if to emphasize the Scottish scene the next contingent to come down the parade route was an Indian pipe band. Resplendent in blue tunics, dark trousers and with full plaidys flowing, they came, shoulders swaying in time to the music, causing every guest to tap his toes. Each of the services was represented by a brass band, first singly, then the entire contingent of mass bands, 950 in all, pipes, drums & brass paraded to the applause of the crowd.

The reason we were all there was to witness the lowering of the flag at sunset. This was to be no ordinary flag lowering, but an extremely emotional ceremony. First the hushed rise & fall of the drums followed by Brahms Lullaby and then Abide With Me, played ever so softly and accented by a lone

bugler high up in a far off bell tower. The gentle pealing of the tower bells kept perfect time with the bands as they played Abide With Me.

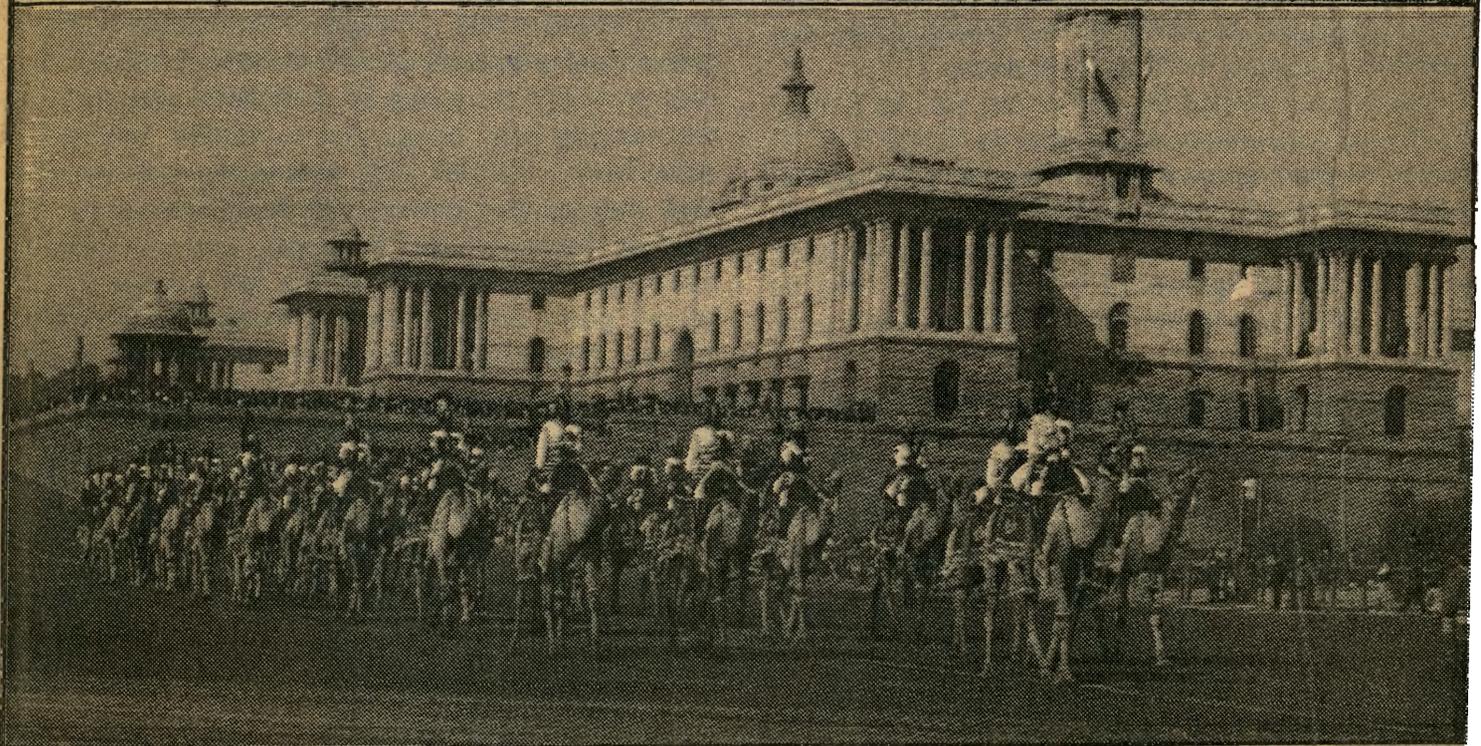
The anti-climax was the Buglers 10 on the roof of each of four parliament buildings, sounding the final retreat. The two high parapets of the main building were ringed with soldiers mounted on camels which stood stiff, straight & proud during the entire one-hour ceremony. The climax came as hundreds of fireworks in the three colors of the Indian flag, orange, white & green, burst in the air.

Then a great cry went up and everyone leapt to their feet, as, with one flip of a switch, each of the six buildings that make up the houses of parliament, and the secretariat covering one square mile of territory, were illuminated by millions of light bulbs. A sight that could be seen from miles around.

A most magnificent experience and one to remember forever.

Indo Canadian

Joan Mayo



ON PARADE ... The writer viewed this colorful march past, held annually on Jan. 26,

India's Republic Day, on Vijay Chowk, New Delhi.