

TROOPER COLLINS

Legend has it that a ghost haunts Horse Guards. I captured this image at night, when something had clearly startled his horse…

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Caught OFF GUARD

Granted rare, behind-the-scenes access to Britain's most storied regiment, photographer Glenn Røkeberg has captured the Household Cavalry as never before – from polished pageantry to the unguarded moments off duty

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TROOPER BALEIWAI
This is one of my favourite images. After a bad fall from her horse moments earlier, she remounted to complete her Kit Ride



CAPTAIN JAMES BIRD
All work? Neigh! Here, James Bird is keeping himself and his horse hydrated on a summer ride to the pub

My first encounter with the oldest and most fabled regiment in the British Army was their Musical Ride at the Oslo Horse Show. This choreographed equestrian display in full regalia is a celebration of horsemanship, precision and tradition. But one moment in particular sparked my creative curiosity.

'Lying Horse' is an intricate and daring manoeuvre. A trooper, known as a Monkey Man, dismounts and, at their command, the horse folds its legs, sinking to the ground. I have been a commercial photographer all my life, taking pictures of everything from cars to toothpaste, but this arresting image of a magnificent animal on the ground beside a soldier awakened a long-dormant artistic instinct in me. My fingers itched for my camera.

But taking pictures of the Household Cavalry, that illustrious unit of The Life Guards and The Royal Horse Guards and 1st Dragoons (The Blues and Royals), seemed like a pipe dream. Why would a Norwegian photographer with no connections in British society be welcomed into the closed world of the British Army's most senior unit, the regiment that serves as the monarch's personal bodyguard?

The introduction came in 2023 via a circuitous, serendipitous route. My daughter, a lawyer who lives in London, knew a very well-connected retired general through her work. She told him of my desire and he made a telephone call. Then, on a spring day in 2024, I was invited inside the heavily secured Hyde Park Barracks, home to the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment since 1795.

Behind the imposing brutalist walls, I took a photograph that remains my favourite of the series. It is of Corporal of Horse Andy Drummond on his Drum Horse, Harry. Andy is a burly man, but on top of Harry, supposedly the second largest horse in Europe, he looks tiny. In the image, Harry carries the copper training drums. I immediately know when an image 'works', and on this day I had that tingling sensation.

It became the cover of my book, *Trusted Guardians: Inside the Mounted Regiment*. But at the time, I had no idea there would ever be a book. Instead, I thought I'd take around a dozen photographs of the storied regiment.

I cannot pinpoint exactly when this undertaking became a major photographic project, but I know that Captain Elizabeth Godwin was the catalyst. She was an outstanding woman. The subject of her own feature in *Tatler*, she was the first female officer to commission into the Life Guards, awarded the Sword of Honour at Sandhurst. She was also my handler and known to me as Lizzie; a friendly, easygoing and disarming young woman who spoke freely of her ambitions, her wish to be of service, her desire to pay back. I thought: 'She is just 27 years old, what has she to pay back?'

Knowing Captain Lizzie, willing as she was to put her life on the line for King and Country, had an effect on me. I had been coasting in my life. After a reasonably successful career and ▷

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TROOPER PROSSER

He is waiting to take part in the daily Punishment Parade at Horse Guards. This dates to the reign of Queen Victoria, who, tired of finding her guards drunk or asleep on the job, initiated the parade as a penalty. These days, it's just a nod to tradition

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TROOPER SINGH
He was on his way to polish his jackboots – they are inspected when the troopers ride out on guard duty



CORPORAL OF HORSE DRUMMOND
Andy Drummond on parade with a practice drum. The real ones are pure silver and, according to legend, cast from White House silverware



TROOPER CRATHERN
The regiment decamps to the coast for summer camp to kick back and let loose



SURGEON LIEUTENANT COLONEL JEDGE H LEWIN OBE FRCGP
The Household Cavalry is now the only unit with its own regimental surgeon. He wears a bicorn hat with black cockerel feathers, which he nicknames 'the black plume of death'

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CAPTAIN ELIZABETH GODWIN
I made Lizzie sit for this portrait – she had such an infectious energy, it was the only time I ever saw her sit still

◁ a happy family life, I was in need of a challenge. Perhaps Lizzie sensed that. She kicked me into gear, asking: 'Glenn, what is your five-year plan?'

I didn't have an answer, but I knew that photographing the Household Cavalry would play a role. I devoted myself to documenting the daily life of its women, men and horses. Completely self-funded, I zigzagged between Norway and Britain, photographing the regiment in London, Wiltshire and Windsor, at work and at rest, in full pomp and pageantry, as well as the moments behind closed doors. I captured the farriers at work in the Hyde Park Barracks forge, blasting rock music as they shoed the horses; soldiers blowing off steam with a game of football at summer camp in Hampshire; the horses grazing on their holiday in Melton Mowbray.

Trusted Guardians was not all plain sailing. I was determined to photograph all facets of the regiment. In particular, I wanted to go to the Bulford Camp, where soldiers and officers work at the forefront of the British Army's fielding of AJAX, a next-generation armoured fighting vehicle. As my contacts tried to secure permission for this assignment, I fell foul of the Ministry of Defence. Some well-meaning person had referred to me as 'the regiment's photographer-in-residence'. The MoD was quick to point out that I certainly did not hold this role; not least because such a role did not exist.

And then they took issue with some of my photographs. I had pictured Captain Lizzie underneath a tree alongside her horse, Praetorian. Her hair was the problem: loose around her shoulders, not, as the rules dictated, tucked into a bun. Another picture was flagged, too: Trooper Crathern at summer camp, topless and carefree, tossing a ball, a cigarette between his lips. The regiment could not be seen to endorse smoking, I was told.

The MoD eventually decided that any photographs taken before their knowledge of my project were not their responsibility. I was grateful for this decision as I was beginning to realise I didn't just have an exhibition on my hands – as I had previously thought – but a bound book of around 350 photographs, whittled down from thousands. In discussions with my contacts, it became clear that it would fall to me to finance such a project and so I agreed to shoulder half the production costs of publication.

Captain Lizzie was an enthusiastic champion of the book. And then, last September, her life was tragically cut short in a senseless car crash. It was horribly sad to finish the project without her, when she had been so integral to it. *Trusted Guardians* is dedicated to her.

The hardest picture to take of all those printed in the book was definitely the image of King Charles III at the Order of the Garter ceremony in Windsor. The pressure was intense. I was nervous. There were 400 people behind me, waiting to be ushered into a drinks reception with the King, watching me take the picture. I knew I would only have a few seconds to get the shot.

I consider the book my love letter to the Mounted Regiment, a snapshot of the two years I spent with these unparalleled women, men and horses. And I haven't stopped photographing them. Despite my initial inspiration for this project, I never got the shot of the 'Lying Horse'. I'll keep shooting until I do. □

Trusted Guardians: Inside the Mounted Regiment by Glenn Røkeberg is published on 14 April (Unicorn, £60)

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