

Corps Of Drums History

Thursday, 19 August 2004

Last Updated Monday, 18 September 2006

Test --The Corps of Drums dates from 1650 when the Regiment contained one Drum Major and twenty drummers. The modern Corps of Drums can be assumed to date from the Cardwell Reforms of 1872, when the drummers from each company in the battalions were grouped together in a "Corps" under a "Drum Major".

Today the Coldstream Guards has one Corps of Drums, which is a part of the 1st Battalion. It consists of an officer (the Adjutant of the 1st Battalion) and at least 20 men. The Corps of Drums takes new members from recruits undergoing Phase II training or later, once a Guardsman has served for a time in the Regiment. A potential Drummer attends the Drummers' Course at Catterick, Yorkshire for approximately 5 months, where he learns to use his chosen instrument and receives "top up" military training.

Until recently, members of the Corps of Drums formed the Machine Gun Platoon within the Battalion. They are now being re-trained as Assault Pioneers, with expertise in explosives, demolitions, water purification, operating heavy plant machinery and a wide variety of construction skills. Regardless of their role, Drummers are primarily Infantrymen and are as skilled as rifle company Guardsmen. The Drummers strive to set the highest standards of smartness and behaviour, both on and off duty. The manner in which the Corps of Drums and individual

Drummers carry out their duties is a mark of the efficiency and smartness of the Battalion.

Being a member of the Corps of Drums carries a number of advantages. The Drummers have a unique part to play, both in terms of their musical and specialist Infantry skills. The Corps of Drums is very much the "shop window" of the Battalion and it tends to attract the most attention from the public and the press. The Corps of Drums tends to travel more widely and more often than the other platoons. Promotion within the Corps of Drums is done on an equal basis with the rest of the Battalion. Finally, the skills learned as a part of Assault Pioneer training often come with a civilian qualification, recognised by employers outside the Army.

The Corps of Drums has an important ceremonial role, both in London and elsewhere. The Drum Major maintains an important position in the Regiment. On parade, his turnout must be immaculate and his precision of drill and leadership must be worthy of the standards of his forebears. On operations, he assumes the role of platoon commander and must therefore have a high degree of military skill and knowledge.

The Drum Major is appointed a Household Drummer to the Sovereign and as such wears Her Majesty's State Clothing during occasions of State Ceremony, such as Trooping the Colour. Such clothing is not military uniform but Royal Household Dress. The version worn today is unchanged from that worn in 1901. The tunic alone is worth approximately £8,000.

The Drum Major's staff, or "mace", has its roots in the 17th Century. One, dated 1671, is displayed at Armoury House in the City of London. The Drum Major's elaborate cross belt, embellished with Battle Honours and the Regimental Cap Star, recalls the original leather drummer's "carriage" worn by the senior or Sergeant Drummer to secure his drumsticks when not in use. To make room for various embellishments, the drummer's sticks have become smaller but continue in the modern day to be a symbol of the Drum Major's original appointment.

Regimental Marches

The Regimental Quick March is "Milanollo" and the Regimental Slow March is an extract from the opera "The Marriage of Figaro" by Mozart and simply entitled "Figaro".