CHAPTER 6

THE DRUM

SECTION 30. — INTRODUCTION

0601. The history of the drum, like that of the flute and bugle, has been dealt with separately elsewhere in this book. It is obvious from this that the drum has by far the most ancient of origins.

0602. The generally accepted line up for a Corps of Drums is bass drum, tenor drums and side drums. Tenor drums have declined in popularity recently, especially in service Corps of Drums. Indeed, many regiments do not even have them at all.

0603. In this chapter, the three major percussion instruments will be dealt with.

SECTION 31. — TYPES OF DRUM

The Side Drum

0604. The side drum is an instrument of indefinite pitch and cannot, by its very design, play different notes. It is essential to the Corps of Drums in providing dash and flourish to the music, and supporting the flute parts by use of intricate beatings and dynamics.

0605. The modern side drum is simply a wooden or metal cylinder or shell, each end of which is covered by a thin membrane made of either skin or plastic. These membranes are called heads and it is usual for the bottom head or snare head to be thinner than the top or batter head in order to improve its sensitivity to the snare action. The heads are held in place by wooden hoops which are secured by an arrangement of steel claw brackets and threaded rods. These screw into the centre brackets which in turn are screwed to the shell. There are eight such rod and claw assemblies on both top and bottom hoops making sixteen in all, and by tightening these rods the tension on the heads may be increased thus improving the tone of the drum.

0606. The snare head is so called because it has stretched across it gut or wire strands or snares. These are essential to the operation of the drum, since without them there would not be the characteristic 'snap and tizz' of the snare vibrating when the drum is struck.

0607. The batter head, as its name suggests, is the head upon which the drummer beats with his sticks. Some side drums are fitted with internal snare fittings which are set up to vibrate on the underside of the batter head. Sometimes these are referred to as top head snares.

0608. Whether top head or bottom head snares, both are fitted with a snare throw off switch, a device which allows the drummer to literally switch the snares away from the heads so that they no longer rattle against them and thus give a tom-tom type sound for special effect.

0609. Finally, and this applies equally to bass and tenor drums, there are, on the top hoop,

compared to the old rope tensioned drums with animal skin heads. This section begins at the top hoop and works down the drum to cover all components.

Hoops

0616. Drum hoops are usually wooden (though some are chromed metal) and are made of ash wood. Most regiments have their drum hoops painted in their regimental colours. Maintenance is limited to polishing the paintwork with a proprietary furniture cream, or touching in the paintwork when it becomes chipped. The top edge of the hoop is most likely to suffer damage due to accidental knocks with the sticks whilst playing or when the drum is rested upon a rough or uneven surface. Some regiments, notably in the Foot Guards, have the top edge of the hoop scraped down and coated with polyurethane varnish. It eliminates unsightly chips and gives a tough weatherproof coating.

0617. Attached to the top hoop (sometimes called the carriage hoop) are three metal feet on which the drum stands when not in use. These are held in place by two small countersunk screws. Checking for security is the only maintenance required. Also attached to the top hoop is the carriage hook under which the drum knot or ring is fitted. This is bolted through the hoop and again checking for security is the only maintenance required.

Claw and Rod Assembly

0618. The claw bracket and rod assembly require little in the way of maintenance. They are usually chromium plated and a polish over with a soft duster will remove finger marks, etc. The threaded portion of the rod should be lubricated prior to assembly with a little petroleum jelly to prevent corrosion and seizing into the centre bracket. When taking up tension on the rods, a proper key should always be used to avoid damage to the slotted screw-head.

Heads

0619. The heads require wiping over with a damp cloth, from time to time, to remove any dust or dirt. On no account should any abrasive cleaner be used, though a little soap will aid cleaning. Plastic heads do not often break but nothing is indestructible. The major causes of head failure are:

a. Overtightening (particularly when fitting new heads).

b. Striking with the thick end of the stick (especially when seeking greater volume for practising arms drill with the drum).

c. Tightening unevenly.

0620. There are two methods for ensuring even tension of a drum head after replacement. The first is to tighten, by a few turns, each rod in sequence around the drum. The other is to work diagonally across the drum. This last method is frowned upon by some drum experts

is evenly tensioned. These are the 'eye test', the 'finger test' or the 'rocking test'.

0624. The eye test requires the drummer to look across the top of the hoop. Any discrepancies in rod tension will be indicated by the hoop being distorted. This is easily rectified by adjusting the rod at the point where the hoop is distorted so that the hoop, when viewed from the side, sits perfectly square on the drum.

0625. A similar, simple test is the finger test; by running a finger around the join between the hoop and the shell over which the head is stretched, any over or under tension between rods will result in the gap being wider (over tensioned) or narrower (under tensioned). Adjustment should be made accordingly until the gap is a uniform width all round.

0626. The final method involves standing the drum on a table or any flat surface. If the drum is incorrectly tensioned the hoop will be distorted and the drum will rock to and fro. A correctly tensioned drum will sit square and firm on the table.

How Tight

0627. This is largely a matter for the experienced ear but as a general rule, a batter head can be gauged as being at the correct tension by holding a large glass marble (about one inch in diameter) 12 to 14 inches above the head of the drum and dropping it into the centre. The marble should return to the hand without any appreciable movement of the hand to retrieve it. Since much is dependent upon the relative weight of one glass marble to another, it is evident that this method is a rough guide only. It is, however, a useful training method that couples a visual aspect of testing with that of the aural aspect.

0628. As for the snare head, the tension required is much less and since the snare head is so thin, it is more likely to split during tensioning than the batter head. A simple but effective method of checking for correct tension is as follows. Grasp the bottom hoop, with the thumb over the hoop and resting on the head about one inch away from the snares. By exerting moderate pressure with the thumb it should be just possible to make a depression in the head. If this cannot be done, the head is too tight; if this can be done easily, then the head requires tensioning.

0629. Both batter and snare heads tend to lose their tension due to stretching or 'creep'. This applies particularly to new heads which have only been on the drum for a day or two. Checks should be carried out frequently during this time and the drum re-tensioned if required. Under no circumstances should a new head be tensioned beyond the marble test limit in an effort to compensate in advance for tension loss due to 'creep', as this would inevitably lead to damage to the head, claw, rod or centre bracket.

0630. Bass and tenor drums should be checked using the method outlined above for the snare head.

CHAPTER 11

PLAYING THE SIDE DRUM

SECTION 43. — SIDE DRUM TECHNIQUE

Introduction

1101. The ease with which side drummers can be trained in comparison to, say, flute players, tends to undermine the importance of good technique and leads to some misconception on the part of those whose instrument the drum is destined to be. Anyone who takes up the drum as his instrument should not be mislead into believing that his will be a simple task. Almost anyone with a sense of rythm and co-ordination can learn to beat a side drum – few become good percussionists!

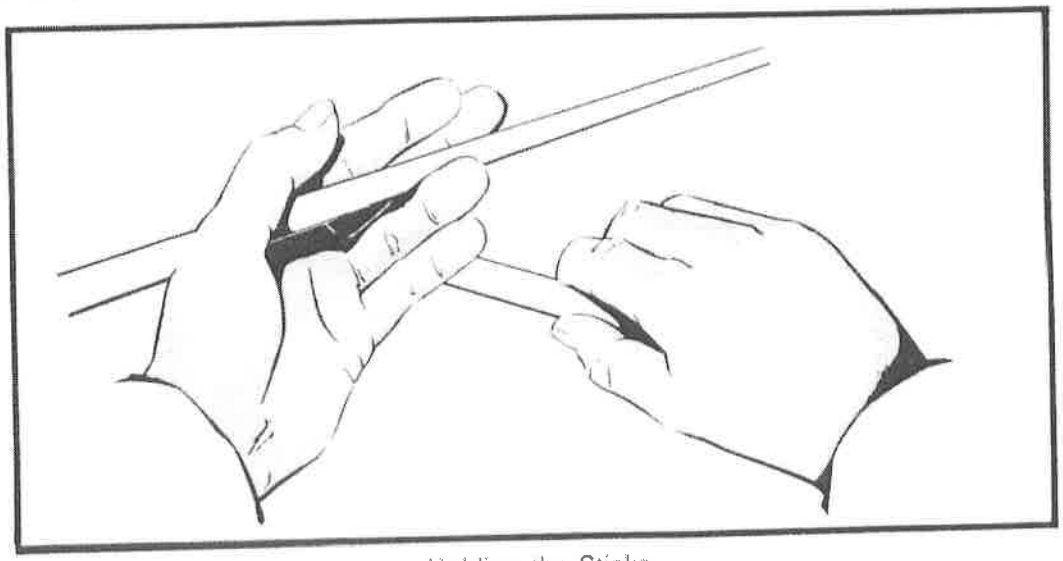
1102. The aim of this chapter is to provide sufficient information about the technique of drumming to form a basis for future development.

Holding the Sticks

1103. The left hand takes an underhand grip with the stick passing under the thumb, over the first and second fingers and behind the third and fourth fingers. Four to five inches of the stick should protrude to the left as shown.

1104. The right hand takes an overhand grip and the stick is held between the ball of the thumb and the centre joint of the forefinger. The second finger of the hand assists in controlling the bounce and direction of the stick. Again, four to five inches of the stick should protrude under the palm from the point where it is held.

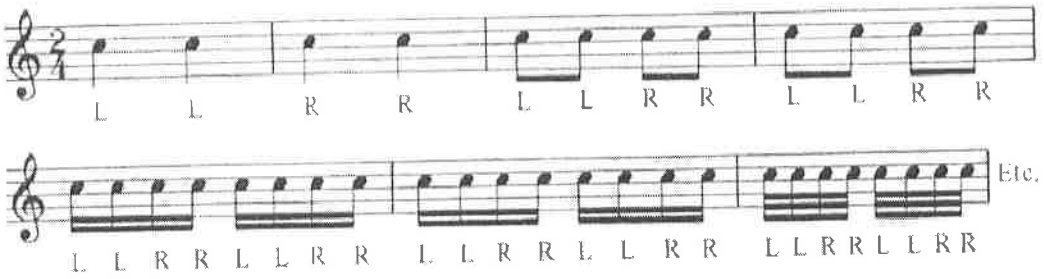
1105. The sticks should be held lightly, but not loosely, and should bounce easily when striking the drum head.



Holding the Sticks

side drummers never totally achieve. Each stick must beat with equal force and no accentuation should be made. All too often a side drum section, for instance beating a five pace roll, has a sound similar to 'RIGADIGADIGADIGADOM' where accentuation of each beat of the roll is being made by the side drummers, often accompanied by a loose and untidy roll. The side drummer must seek to achieve a smooth, tight roll and leave the bass drum to put in the beats. A good roll should sound more like an even buzzing sound – 'Bzzzzzzzzzzzz', ending crisply without accent unless marked. So although the first exercise is simple in application, it is critically important to good drumming.

Open to Close Roll



1111. The above example indicates how the speed increases. This increase may be as slow as the instructor sees fit within the capabilities of his student. There will come a time when co-ordination fails and so the novice should begin the exercise again, slowly working up speed. It is obvious that a roll, when beaten fast, will require so many notes to be written to a bar that the writing would become very cumbersome and tedious. With that in mind, a roll is written thus:

1112. Where possible a roll should always end on a single stroke – it is much more precise and tidy than a loose ending.

1113. The value of the notation remains the same as outlined in Chapter 10. — The Rudiments of Music and the roll is indicated by three short lines written across the tail of the note. In the case of a semibreve, having no tail, the lines are written below the note.

SECTION 44. — EXERCISES – BASIC TECHNIQUE

1114. There are a number of basic techniques that go to make up the full range of beatings that all drummers should be competent in executing. The major or more common techniques are outlined in this section.

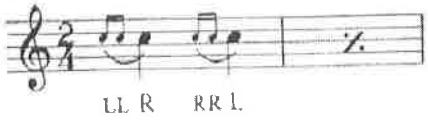
Rolls

1115. The open to close roll (long roll or mummy-daddy roll) has been explained in

emphasis being on the 'DOP' (by saying this quickly a fair simulation of the application of a flam may be achieved).

Practise beating flams
'hand to hand'

1121. The drag, too, has a 'feint' beaten before the principal note. The difference being the feint is composed of two rapid strokes thus giving a 'ZOP' sound.



Again – practise beating
'hand to hand'

1122. ***Ruffs or Roughs.*** These are quite similar to a drag but have a more elongated feint. Beaten with a 'TAKATATA' configuration.

These are not normally practised
'hand to hand' but may be if so required

Paradiddle

1123. This is perhaps the most complicated of all the techniques since it requires some considerable skill to master. As if the basic paradiddle were not difficult enough there are variations that embody flams or drags or both. Examples of the simpler beatings are given below. The paradiddle is an important exercise and technique, particularly for leading side drummers and also for syncopation. It forms the basis for a number of complex solo beatings and is recommended as a technique worth learning even if only for the satisfaction of playing it well – many so called side drummers cannot!

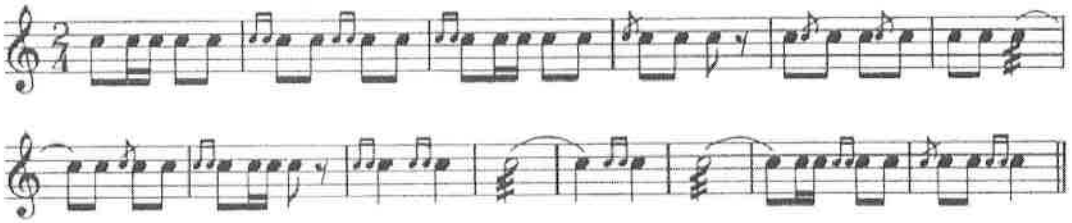
Basic Paradiddle

Etc.

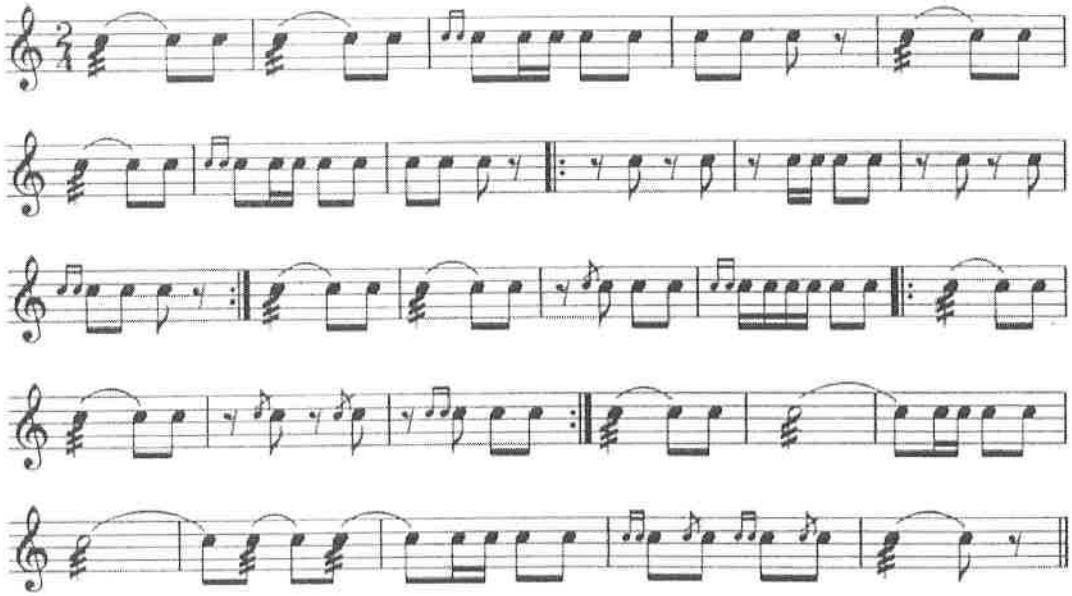
1124. The exercise should begin slowly and deliberately, working up speed gradually. Once co-ordination is lost the novice should begin again. He must aim to be able to beat the paradiddle at normal marching speed.

Flam Paradiddle Drag Paradiddle

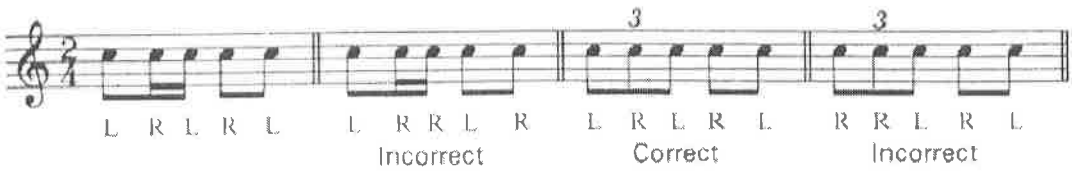
1131. *Flams, Drags and Rolls.*



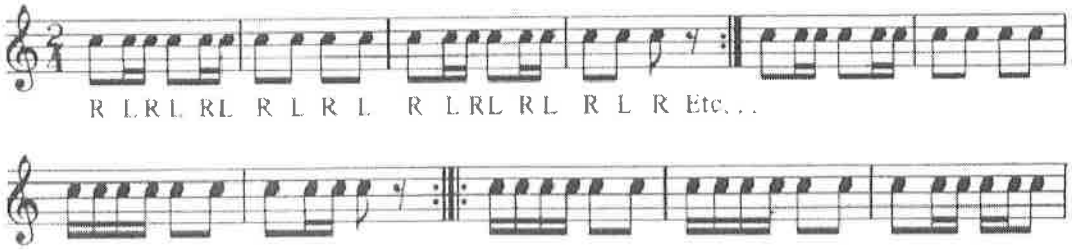
1132. *A Typical Side Drum Piece.* Incorporating various techniques.



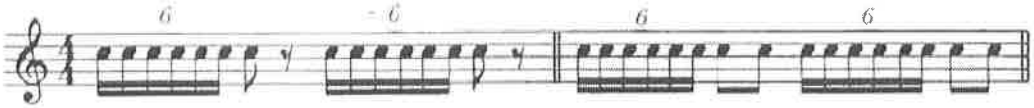
1133. *Duplets and Triplets.* Beaten 'hand to hand'.



1134. *Duplets and Multiple Exercises.* Alternate the starting hand.

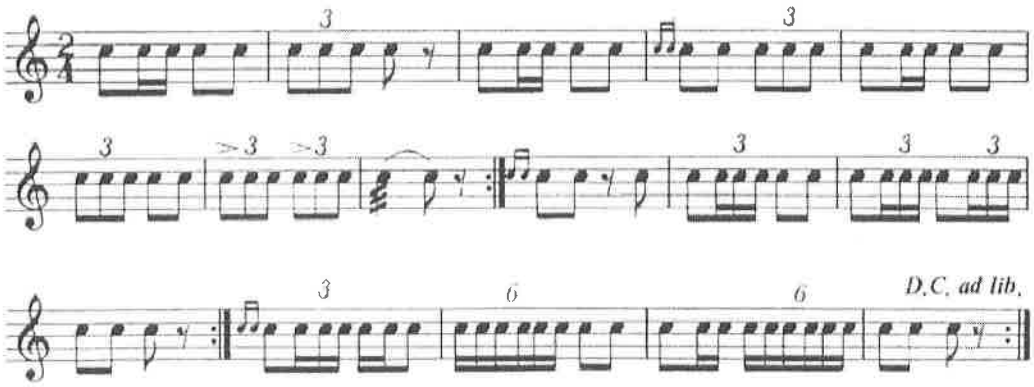


1140. ***Sixes and Stroke.*** Build up speed to accomplish the sixes at marching speed.



1141. ***Exercise on Nines.*** Practise on alternate starting hand and build up speed to marching tempo.

1142. ***Typical Side Drum Piece.*** Incorporating the triplets and sixes.



1143. ***Basic Paradiddle and Variations.***

Paradiddle Flam Paradiddle Drag Paradiddle Drag/Flam Paradiddle

Drag/Triplet Paradiddle