

BC Feature Story
February 25, 2008
Word count: 1472



The United States Army Field Band

The Musical Ambassadors of the Army
Washington, DC

THE UNITED STATES ARMY FIELD BAND

Feature Story

The internationally famous U.S. Army Field Band of Washington, DC, is the official touring musical representative of the U.S. Army. As a distinguished member of Congress aptly described the band, “It is a great instrument for stirring patriotic emotions.” A music critic for the *Boston Globe* called a Field Band performance “a cause to stand up and cheer.”

The band is under the operational control of the Army’s Chief of Public Affairs at the Pentagon. Known as “The Musical Ambassadors of the Army,” the Field Band travels thousands of miles each year on three major concert tours, and is considered by music critics to be one of the most distinctive musical organizations now appearing before the public. All concert tours are conducted at the direction of the Secretary of the Army, and performances are open to the general public, free of charge.

The Field Band was organized on March 21, 1946, when General Jacob L. Devers issued the following order to Chief Warrant Officer Chester E. Whiting, the commander of the Army’s First Combat Infantry Band:

“I want you to organize a band that will carry into the grassroots of our country the story of our magnificent Army, its glorious traditions and achievements; and of the great symbol of American manhood—the ground soldier.”

Whiting was the Field Band’s commander until November 1960, when he retired from the Army with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In his 14 years as commander, Colonel Whiting guided the fledgling band and led it on tours around the world. Under his baton, the band performed in all 50 states, Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Europe, the Far East, Central and South America, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Colonel Thomas H. Palmatier of Ballston Spa, New York, is the band’s present commander and conductor. He is the ninth director in the Field Band’s history. Colonel Palmatier brings to this command more than 20 years experience in military music.

The Musical Ambassadors are the Army’s finest Soldier-musicians. Many have studied at the country’s leading conservatories and schools of music, have performed with major symphonies, and taught at colleges and universities before entering the service. All of the musicians have been selected by

highly competitive audition for assignment to the Field Band.

The Soldiers' Chorus, the vocal complement of the Field Band, is made up of 29 highly trained and talented vocalists. The chorus presents arrangements of well-known popular and patriotic compositions at each performance.

The Field Band's concert repertoire is designed to appeal to all audiences, offering classical, semi-classical and popular selections, choral arrangements, novelty numbers, and military marches on each of its programs. On tours of other nations, the band highlights the works of American composers, as well as presenting favorite selections of each host country.

The Musical Ambassadors frequently travel abroad on tours sponsored by the U.S. Army and the State Department. The first of these tours included eight countries in the United Kingdom and Europe, and was highlighted by performances at London's Royal Festival Hall and the opening of the Edinburgh Music Festival. Major concerts were also presented in Berlin, Paris, and Amsterdam.

On its second European tour, the Field Band appeared in 12 countries. This marked the first time a service band of the United States played in Yugoslavia, with concerts in Belgrade and Zagreb behind the Iron Curtain. The Field Band became the first major U.S. Army band to appear in Norway, Denmark, Portugal, and Monaco. Concert sites on this tour included the Municipal Stadium in Belgrade, St. Mark's Square in Venice, and Tivoli Park in Copenhagen.

The band later traveled to Hawaii, Japan, Korea, and Okinawa, presenting 45 concerts in 41 days. These included special performances for the President of Korea and U.S. and United Nations troops, as well as a television broadcast to all parts of Japan. The Field Band was the first group of visiting artists ever to receive a standing ovation in Yokohama.

In January 1970, the Musical Ambassadors became the first U.S.-based Army band to tour Latin America. The Field Band and Soldiers' Chorus performed 12 times in 15 days in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, the Canal Zone, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In 1987, the Concert Band and Soldiers' Chorus flew to the Far East for performances in Korea, Okinawa, and Japan. They also visited several cities in the former Federal Republic of Germany and celebrated the 750th anniversary of the city of Berlin with a concert at the renowned Philharmonie.

In February 1989, the Field Band traveled to the Republic of India to perform at the Eighth Indian Engineering Trade Fair, where the United States was the "Partner Country." A total of 96 performances were given in 12 days. The Concert Band and Soldiers' Chorus performed for Indian President R. Venkataraman and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The Concert Band also performed two days of concerts and clinics for the Indian Army Band. This was the first time a Washington-based premier military band toured in India and the first time a U.S. Army unit was allowed on an Indian Army base.

During the spring of 1994, the Field Band traveled to Europe to commemorate the 50th anniversary of D-Day. The tour included formal concerts, memorial services, and parades in England, Wales, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany. Highlights were performances in Bastogne, Belgium, for veterans involved in the Battle of the Bulge. In Portsmouth, England, the band supported a drumhead service, in which a unit that is engaged in battle has its colors draped over an altar made of drums from the band. Attending the service were Queen Elizabeth II of England, President Clinton, and 12 other heads-of-state. The Musical Ambassadors also performed a joint concert at the National Music Conservatory in Luxembourg City with that nation's premier military band.

The Field Band traveled to Honolulu, Hawaii, in August 1995 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of V-J Day and the end of World War II. While on Oahu, the group performed for President Clinton and participated in a televised memorial service for veterans.

Invitations to perform at the Norwegian Military Tattoo took the band to Oslo in 2000 and 2006. In addition to indoor marching exhibitions, the Field Band played at the Norwegian Royal Palace.

In 2001 and 2004, the Concert Band and Soldiers' Chorus flew to Alaska, where concert sites ranged from the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts in Anchorage to the remote settlement of Barrow, above the Arctic Circle. Joined by members of the Jazz Ambassadors, the Volunteers toured Hawaii in 2005.

On its tours within the continental United States, the Field Band has performed at many of the country's finest venues, including the Hollywood Bowl, Severance Hall in Cleveland, the Red Rocks Theater in Denver, the Hatch Shell and Symphony Hall in Boston, the San Francisco Opera House, the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion of the Los Angeles Music Center, and the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. Components of the Field Band have also participated in major festivals at Chautauqua, Interlochen, Breckenridge, and Tanglewood.

The Field Band was the first military band to present a formal concert in New York's Carnegie Hall. The band also appeared at the New York and Seattle World's Fairs, represented the U.S. Army at EXPO '67 in Montreal, and supported the rededication of the Statue of Liberty on July 4, 1986.

The Concert Band and Soldiers' Chorus regularly perform joint concerts with major orchestras, including the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Boston Pops, Dallas Symphony, and the Cincinnati Pops. In addition to working with some of the most prominent orchestral conductors, including Keith Lockhart and Erich Kunzel, the Musical Ambassadors are frequently featured in nationally televised broadcasts on Memorial Day and the Fourth of July.

The Field Band is often called upon to participate in a variety of ceremonial events. The band has marched in numerous Presidential Inaugural Parades, escorted the President on many occasions, and played for visiting heads-of-state. They also perform special commemorative concerts at the Kennedy

Center in Washington, DC, including for the Bicentennial of the Constitution and the 50th Anniversary of World War II.

The Musical Ambassadors have an extensive educational outreach program that reaches more than 100,000 students annually, from preschool to postgraduate. The organization has developed a series of reference recordings and instructional videotapes, which are in use in schools throughout the nation.

The Field Band, as the musical voice of the Army, is authorized to carry and display the U.S. Army Flag. This banner bears 174 streamers representing all of the Army's past campaigns from the Revolutionary War to Iraq. In its ongoing commitment to honor returning American Soldiers, concerts since 2005 have honored veterans of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

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