



The United States Army Field Band

The Musical Ambassadors of the Army
Washington, D.C.

Origins – Volume II:

THE SOLDIERS' CHORUS

How it was Established by its First Directors

by SFC Brian Eldridge

OCTOBER 1944

When Chester E. Whiting returned from service in the Pacific Theater with his men from the Americal Division Band, he reported to Fort George G. Meade, Maryland to organize the 1st Combat Infantry Band, an ensemble made up entirely of combat veterans. A progression of bands at Ft. Meade began that would lead to the creation of The United States Army Field Band several years later. Vocal ensembles were present from the beginning that would evolve into the Soldiers' Chorus that we know today, due in large part to the efforts of three directors: Fritz Kurzweil, Arthur V. Donofrio, and Eugene W. Coughlin.

1944-1946

THE 1st COMBAT INFANTRY BAND and its GLEE CLUB

By December of 1944, Chief Warrant Officer Whiting had organized the 1st Combat Infantry Band, which was ready to travel and support the 6th War Loan Tour, perform for radio broadcasts, utilize both marching and concert capabilities, and connect with audiences in a variety of venues. Almost immediately after the band took up residence at Ft. Meade, a vocal group was formed which would be known as the "band choir," "choral group," the "men's chorus," and eventually the "glee club." From then until now, the band would never be without a choral component.

Helping make this possible, one of Whiting's band members became an enlisted conductor who would go on to shape the unit's history. Twenty-one year old Arthur V. Donofrio attended the New England Conservatory of Music where he studied violin and school music. Before entering the Army, he conducted productions with the Beacon Light Opera Company in Boston and played in the Boston NYA Orchestra under Arthur Fiedler. He served in the Caribbean Defense Area during World War II, primarily in Puerto Rico.¹



Arthur V. Donofrio (Source: US Army Field Band Archives)

Donofrio played bass clarinet with the 1st Combat Infantry Band, sang in the glee

Meade Chorus Being Formed

[Special to The Evening Sun]
Fort Meade, Md., March 22—Soldier and WAC voices will combine in a chorus being organized here under Private Fritz Kurzweil, former European conductor. Kurzweil holds the degree of doctor of philosophy in music from the University of Vienna, where he founded and conducted the Vienna Youth Chorus.

He left for Holland shortly after the Germans annexed Austria, and later came to America. In the United States he has been guest conductor of the New York and Philadelphia symphony orchestras, and for a time was conductor of the Philadelphia Opera Chorus. He is assigned to the special service office of the Army Ground Force Depot here.

The Baltimore Evening Sun,
22 March 1944

FRITZ KURZWEIL and the FT. MEADE MIXED CHORUS:

On 22 March 1944, nearly seven months before Whiting returned to the United States to organize the 1st Combat Infantry Band, the *Baltimore Evening Sun* published a story describing a mixed chorus being formed at Ft. Meade, featuring male vocalists from the Regular Army and female vocalists from the Women's Army Corps. On 22 May 1944, the *Evening Sun* wrote about the group's concert debut, referring to it as the "Fort Meade Soldiers' Chorus." It was assigned to the Army Ground Forces Replacement Depot No. 1—the same location the 1st Combat Infantry Band would be assigned—and directed by 32 year old Private First Class Fritz Kurzweil.

Kurzweil was born in Vienna, Austria where he founded and conducted the Vienna Youth Chorus and earned a PhD in musicology from The University of Vienna, composing his PhD thesis on the harmony of Johannes Brahms. In March 1938 when the Nazis took

(continued)

club, and would eventually take on the role of assistant conductor.

The 1st Combat Infantry Band's first tour, supporting the 6th War Loan Tour, concluded in early January 1945. According to an article in *The Infantry Journal*, by the end of January, its performances featured "military, classical, and swing music, and several chorus numbers."² Their second tour began on 12 February 1945 and took them to ten states in 61 days. On 15 February 1945, *The News Leader* described the concert in Staunton, VA: "The blending voices of the soldiers singing melodies of the South Pacific vividly portrayed the quiet romance and solicitude of the islands where these men were sent to serve." On 12 March, *The Indianapolis News* wrote "One of the numbers presented on the program was a Fiji song played and sung in the native music and language by a group of the band members who had served in these islands."

Program Presented
The program presented was as follows: Opening, "Kings of the Highways", official Infantry march; Star-Spangled Banner; medley of George Gershwin tunes; "Scenes from Sierras" by Bennett; vocal, "I'll Get By", Richard Hyde; march, "Colonel Bogey"; violin solo, "Romance", Stanley Wiener; encore, "Horo Staccato", Wiener; overture, "Oberon"; drum and trumpet novelty, "Ciribiribin"; vocal, "What A Difference A Day Makes", Richard Hyde; walkoff novelty; finale, "Silent Night" and "Isa Lei", Fiji farewell song, by the band choir.

(Left) *The Lawrence Daily Eagle* refers to the choral group as the "band choir" after a performance in Laurence, MA during their first tour. 16 Dec 1944.



The 1st Combat Infantry Band, composed of veterans from all our overseas fighting fronts, is a highly versatile organization—in witness of which is this choral group. These men are trained singers, some with classical training. One of the features of the band program which will be heard on the Water Weasel tour is a number of songs in the tongues native to areas where members of the band have fought. The band is launching a tour in conjunction with a national newspaper carrier boy drive to sell enough War Stamps to buy 1000 Water Weasels, our new vehicle designed to travel on land or water with equal facility. Admission to the band's programs is by purchase of War Stamps from your carrier boy. In the choral group are, left to right, front row:

Staff Sergeant Frank B. Whiting, Medford, Massachusetts; Technician 5th Grade Arthur V. Donofrio, Branford, Connecticut; Technician 4th Grade James E. Moore, Fairmount, West Virginia; Technical Sergeant Edward B. Henry, North Andover, Massachusetts; Sergeant Wallace A. Bushey, Syracuse, New York

Second row: Technician 4th Grade Armand P. Rapoza, New Bedford, Massachusetts; Sergeant Domenil E. Bonanno, Revere, Massachusetts; Technician 5th Grade Pasquale Caia, Waltham, Massachusetts; Corporal Frank Lazcko, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Technician 5th Grade Cyrus A. Baylor, Morgantown, West Virginia; Technician 4th Grade Manuel Medeiros, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Third row: Private First Class Harold R. Jubie, Portland, Oregon; Sergeant William R. Orford, Garder City, Long Island; Technician 4th Grade Vernon S. Olsen, San Francisco, California; Sergeant Thomas J. Pulaski, Weedsport, New York; Sergeant John Nicol, Beverly, Massachusetts; Technician 4th Grade Edward T. Doran Jr., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

A news release photo of the newly organized choral group. Arthur Donofrio is pictured front row, 2nd from left. Frank Whiting (brother of Chester Whiting), Henry, Rapoza, Bonanno, Caia, Medeiros, and Nicol served in the Pacific with the Americal Division Band and were probably responsible for programming music they learned while on Viti Levu, Fiji in 1943. (Source: Cyrus Baylor Scrapbook, US Army Field Band Archives)

(Kurzweil, continued)

control of Austria, the persecution of Austrian Jews (90 percent of whom lived in Vienna) began to rapidly worsen. Several years before, Gertrude Sumner Ely of Philadelphia, a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt who had received the *Croix de Guerre* for bravery during World War I, had attended a performance in Vienna conducted by Kurzweil, and was so impressed with Kurzweil's musicianship that she asked him to contact her if he ever came to the United States.³ Fritz was able to contact Ms. Ely, who sponsored his escape from Vienna.

Kurzweil moved to Philadelphia, and established himself as a conductor, pianist, accompanist, and vocal coach. By 1943 he had developed a resume that included conducting positions with the St. Louis Grand Opera, the Philadelphia Choral Society, the Philadelphia Opera Chorus, the New York and Philadelphia Civic Orchestras, and several youth orchestras.

He enlisted in the Army in September of 1943 and, at his first assignment at the 3rd Field Artillery Training Regiment at Ft. Bragg, NC, directed a chorus of 60 voices, played organ for religious services, performed piano solos and accompaniment, and organized a Thanksgiving Music Festival that won praise from high ranking officers and all in attendance.⁴

Ft. Meade Soldiers' Chorus In Debut

[Special to The Evening Sun]

Fort Meade, Md., May 22—The Fort Meade Soldiers' Chorus will make its debut tomorrow, presenting a "Spring Music Festival" at 6 P. M. in Theater No. 3.

Directed by Private Fritz Kurzweil, former Viennese pianist and conductor, the chorus of soldiers and WACs will offer selections ranging from Beethoven's "The Heavens" to "Beautiful Dreamer." The program will conclude with an orchestral and choral rendition of Kurzweil's own composition, "Anthem of Victory."

A narrator for the program will stress the analogy between the advent of spring at the close of winter and the achievement of victory at the end of war. Kurzweil is both pianist and conductor for the chorus and will share the role of soloist with Pfc. Arthur Hoberman and Private John Donovan.

The soldier-conductor fled Austria, where he was conductor of the Vienna Youth Chorus and Symphony, after the Nazi-Austrian Anschluss. He has been guest conductor of both the New York and Philadelphia symphony orchestras.

The Baltimore Evening Sun, 22 May 1944

By the end of February 1945, Fritz Kurzweil, director of the Ft. Meade mixed chorus, had been attached to the 1st Combat Infantry Band and was a critical part of performances as a piano soloist, arranger, composer, and conductor. His Army separation paperwork lists him as the “founder and conductor of a chorus of 24 men” in the 1st Combat Infantry Band. With his expertise and experience, the choral group—now usually referred to as the glee club—was formalized into a larger men’s chorus of 24 voices.

PARAMOUNT THEATRE Long Branch, N. J.	
Friday, November 16, 1945	
THE FIRST COMBAT INFANTRY BAND	
FANFARE	
"Kings of the Highway"—arr. Clayton Schmidt	Burt
MARCH	
"Festal Day"	Roux
POPULAR	
"Liza"—arr. Morrissey	Cohan
POPULAR VOCAL	
"If I Loved You"—arr. Daniel Mendelsohn	Rodger
"Linda"—arr. Daniel Mendelsohn	Ann Ronnell
Soloist: GEORGE CROWDER	
OVERTURE	
"Orpheus in de Underwelt"	Offenbach
VIOLIN SOLO	
"Caprice Viennois"—arr. Stanley Weiner	Kreiser
"Sarba"—arr. Stanley Weiner	Meichel
Soloist: STANLEY WEINER	
VOCAL SOLO	
"The Lord's Prayer"	Malotte
"The Glory Road"—arr. Stanley Weiner	Jacques Wolfe
Soloist: GORDON MYERS	
SYMPHONETTE	
"Pavanne"	
SYMPHONIC SKETCH	
"Roll Out the Barrel"	Composition by Fritz Kurzweil
SAXAPHONE SOLO	
"Danse Hongroise"	
Soloist: ERNEST HARSZY	
MARCH	
"The Ernie Pyle Infantry"—arr. Fritz Kurzweil	Ann Ronnell
PIANO SOLOS	
"Rhapsody in Blue"	Gershwin
"The Child Prodigy"	Morton Gould
Soloist: FRITZ KURZWEIL	
MARCH	
"Semper Fidelis"	Sousa
CHORAL NUMBERS	
"Isei Lei"—arr. Fritz Kurzweil	Fiji Chant
"Bells of St. Mary's"—arr. Fritz Kurzweil	
(By 24-man Chorus with GORDON MYERS as Soloist)	
RHAPSODY	
"The Doughboy Rhapsody"	Kurzweil
FINALE	
ON THE SCREEN—"And Then There Were None"	

(Left) The program from 16 Nov 1945 is representative of the band's other performances. Kurzweil is credited as soloist, conductor, composer, or arranger for seven of the 21 pieces on the concert.

If Band Leader Chester Whiting hadn't kept to his show schedule, last night's enthusiastic audience to the First Combat Band concert in U-T Auditorium would probably still be there whistling, applauding and stomping for encores.

The concert began more or less as other bands begin, although better. As the show progressed, however, the entertainment gathered momentum and carried the audience with it. Novelty numbers, solos and farcical GI poses highlighted the program.

Pfc. Fritz Kurzweil, who led the band in a piano solo of a most unusual arrangement of "Rhapsody in Blue," was a one-man show himself. He was also director of the glee club group. One of the cleverest acts of this group was a take-off on the Infantryman's ingenuity—an orchestra without instruments. The club members pantomimed all the instruments from violins to drums, vocalizing their effects in words.



(Above) The Knoxville News Sentinel, 24 February 1945.

(Near Left) PFC Fritz Kurzweil (Source: US Army Field Band Archives)



The chorus of 24 voices during the 8th Victory Loan Tour. Fritz Kurzweil is pictured far left, and Arthur V. Donofrio, back row, 6th from left. (Source: The David Whiting Collection)

The 1st Combat Infantry Band would go on to conduct two more tours (supporting the 7th War Loan Tour and the 8th Victory Loan Tour), play for radio broadcasts, and perform at Carnegie Hall, Madison Square Garden, and the Pentagon. They were highly successful in helping sell war bonds and raising money for the purchase of the newly developed amphibious vehicle the M29C "Water Weasel" for the war effort. Throughout the rest of 1945, Kurtzweil conducted the glee club, drew critical acclaim for his solo piano work, and was key in the production as a whole through his arranging and composition efforts. Arthur Donofrio was an assistant conductor, leading the band on a regular basis.

The amazing ensemble, marvelous tone quality and precision in playing simply carries one away. Many of the players double in other instruments and in the choral group and what they do, and how they do it, never fails to elicit merited ovations.

Fritz Kurtzweil, an expert pianist, gave a stunning offering of the Rhapsody in Blue and showed his arrangement powers in setting for band Songs of the Infantry, which should be used by every band worth its salt, and in setting for voices the choruses of "Roger Young" that splendid piece by Bob Beebe, dedicated to those who have sacrificed their lives like Roger Young did, to keep this nation free. Gordon Myers sang the vocal solo in this piece with inherent feeling, with Warrant Officer Whiting supplying effective band accompaniment.

Violinist Corp. Stanley Weiner, formerly a member of the Washington, D. C., National Symphony, gave a stunning account of the Sarasate Zigeunerweisen. Another superb item was "Musical Cartoon" for band by Charles Vardell, dean of the Winston-Salem College music department. Here is a real band piece that should attain wide popularity.

The Pittsburgh Press
31 March 1945

(Below) Arthur Donofrio conducts.



(Right) The band's first tour helped raise funds for the Water Weasel.
(Source: Cyrus Baylor Scrapbook)

More than 1,200 persons filled the Colonial Theater last night to hear a bond concert by the First Combat Infantry Band, directed by Warrant Officer Chester E. Whiting. The band membership is composed of 60 combat infantrymen, all of whom have seen overseas service. Vocal solos were given by Gordon Myers and George Crowder. Stanley Werner gave a violin solo and Fritz Kurtzweil, nationally known concert pianist and symphony director played Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." Arthur Donofrio, assistant conductor, led the band in several numbers and Richard Keplinger was narrator.

(Left) *The Lancaster New Era*
4 December 1945

Under the direction of the assistant conductor, Cpl. Arthur Donofrio, the band played a group of well-known melodies taken from "Oklahoma."

The men's chorus under the direction of Fritz Kurtzweil was outstanding. First they sang "Isle Lei," then "The Bells of St. Mary's," with Gordon Myers as soloist. Two encores were presented by this group: a special arrangement of the beloved "Silent Night" and "Angels I Have Heard on High." As the beautiful Christmas music filled the auditorium, you could literally feel the cares and tiredness of the day slip from the shoulders of the listeners. "Prayer of Thanksgiving" brought this group to a close.

Superlatives seem to be the only words suitable for the varied offerings of the program—for all the performers were stars, and presented star numbers. The piano soloist, Fritz Kurtzweil, presented Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue,"—and his inspired playing rated star billing. Next came a different star—George Crowder, singing the popular, "If I Loved You" and "Linda," both numbers bringing applause from the audience and "ahs" from the younger set.

The Daily News
Huntingdon, PA
14 December 1945

One of the New Water Weasels Will Be on Display With the Band on Its Tour



The Water Weasel—New amphibian jeep, costing \$4815 each, in action. Newspaper boys of nation launch 12 weeks' drive to sell enough War Stamps to pay for 1000 of these infantry carriers. First Combat Infantry Band, composed of overseas soldier-musicians, is now on tour under the auspices of the Newspaper Boy and Special Events Sections of the War Finance Division, Treasury Department, to give a series of concerts to spur the Water Weasel drive.



An early photograph of the 1st Combat Infantry Band. Chief Warrant Officer Chester Whiting is pictured far left; Warrant Officer Junior Grade Robert Lewis, far right. Arthur V. Donofrio is pictured in the center of the 2nd row with bass clarinet.
(Source: Cyrus Baylor Scrapbook, US Army Field Band Archives)

1946 POSTWAR TRANSITION MSG Paul F. Kauriga



(Above) MSG Paul Kauriga leads a rehearsal of the glee club in 1946.
(Source: The David Whiting Collection)

(Right) The Infantry Concert Group performs in the Pentagon courtyard. A chamber orchestra made up of string players from major orchestras, the ICG had also been touring, as directed by General Joseph Stilwell, commander of the Army Ground Forces prior to General Devers. They experienced heavy turnover by the end of the War. By early 1946, plans were well underway for the organization of the Army Ground Forces Band, and six remaining members of the ICG were transferred to Ft. Meade to help bring the new band up to full capacity.⁶

(Source: The David Whiting Collection)



HERE is the concert orchestra during rehearsal with M/Sgt. Paul Kauriga conducting. The orchestra is a separate unit from the band although some of the orchestra members are also in the band proper.

(Left) MSG Kauriga leads a rehearsal of the orchestra, which was part of the Army Ground Forces Band for a brief time.
(Source: Ft. Meade Post, 16 August 1946)

1946-1950
THE ARMY GROUND FORCES BAND
Arthur V. Donofrio Leads the “soldiers’ chorus”

On 1 February 1946, Fritz Kurzweil separated from the Army and returned to civilian life, in which he led an active career as a performer and educator. From his daughter Enid’s article in the *Montecito Journal*: “Fredric Kurzweil became Dean of the New York College of Music, was conductor for the New York City Center Opera and the St. Louis Grand Opera, and held other equally prestigious positions. The Kurzweil Recital Hall on the campus of Queensborough Community College in Bayside, New York was dedicated in May, 1974, four years after Fredric’s death; he was the first chairman of the Department of Music at the school.”⁷

After the War, it was no longer possible to maintain a band made up entirely of combat veterans. Chester Whiting was prepared to return to Massachusetts to teach music, but General Jacob Devers, Commander of the Army Ground Forces, believed there was still a need for a band that would tour the United States. Whiting described his interaction with Devers: “This personable and convincing General, whom I did not know then, brought to an end my teaching career in Malden, establishing for me a permanent residence in the United States Army. His faith in that Army, and his devotion to the American Ground Soldier, were deep and abiding... ‘I want you to organize a band that will carry into the grass roots of our country the story of our magnificent Army.’”⁸ On 21 March 1946, the 1st Combat Infantry Band was disbanded and the Army Ground Forces Band organized in its place. All personnel were retained from the 1st Combat Infantry Band, as well as the commander and duty station. However, many of those men transferred to the new band had enough service points to separate from the Army, and Whiting was faced with the task of building the group back to full strength.

Art “Snuffy” Donofrio had been transferred to the Infantry Concert Group (ICG) in February 1946, then returned to Ft. Meade a month later when the remnants of the ICG were combined with the 1st Combat Infantry Band. He separated from the Army on 26 April 1946.⁹ Sergeant Major (retired) Frank Granofsky, who served as timpanist from 1949-1981 and sang in the glee club, recalled that Chester Whiting brought Donofrio back into service to organize the Army Ground Forces Bands’ chorus.¹⁰ Donofrio rejoined the Army on 24 July 1946 and assumed the position of choral director, which he would hold for the next 11 years. As in the 1st Combat Infantry Band, the chorus was made up of instrumentalists from the band. Known initially as the glee club, it was increasingly referred to in newspapers as the “soldiers’ chorus” (lower case). By the mid-1950s, it would be referred to more consistently as the “Soldiers’ Chorus.”



Arthur Donofrio (Source: US Army Field Band Archives)



Donofrio conducts the AGF Band and glee club. (Source: US Army Field Band Archives)



Arthur Donofrio (left) with Chester E. Whiting. (Source: US Army Field Band Archives)



On 2 July 1954, The Montana Standard praised Donofrio: "The Hollywood Bowl, Carnegie Hall and the largest and greatest theaters of Europe and England have resounded to applause for the famed 'Soldiers' Chorus' of the US Army Field Band of Washington, DC. Credit for the forming and continued perfection of this unique vocal group belong to M. Sgt. Arthur V. Donofrio of Branford, Connecticut. From a nucleus of five or six singers evolved the present 30-voice Soldiers' Chorus... as a result of his outstanding work with the Chorus, Donofrio, in 1946, received from Gen. Jacob L. Devers, then Commander of Army Ground Forces, the Commendation Ribbon with Medal Pendant as a tribute to his accomplishments in music."



(Above) Donofrio conducts an outdoor performance as members of the chorus have come forward from their seats. (Source: US Army Field Band Archives)

SOLDIERS WILL SING WITH BAND

**Twenty-Five Voice Chorus
Scheduled To Take Part
In Concert**

The 25-voice soldiers' chorus of the famous army ground forces band will offer a number of varied vocal selections during its present concert tour. It will be heard at Neville auditorium, Wednesday at 8 p. m.

A highly trained singing group, the chorus is under the direction of Master Sergeant Arthur V. Donofrio. He has charge of men who are both instrumentalists and singers. Most of the men in the chorus also play instruments, but each night only for that portion of the program devoted to vocal music, do they turn to singing. Their repertoire includes such numbers as "The Lost Chord," "The Two Americas", songs of Stephen Foster, and the amusing novelty number, "Orchestra without Instruments."

Director of the chorus, Sergeant Donofrio has an extensive and varied background. Prior to entering the service in 1940, he directed operettas for the Beacon Light Opera Company in Boston. He is a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music in the same city. Sergeant Donofrio was also a member of the Boston NYA Orchestra, directed by Arthur Fiedler, conductor of the famous Boston Pops.

In the army, Sgt. Donofrio has been assistant conductor of the combat infantry band and the infantry concert group, both predecessors of the army ground forces band.

*A description of the "soldiers' chorus."
The Monroe News Star, 28 Oct 1947*

1957-1974

THE UNITED STATES ARMY FIELD BAND:

From Donofrio to Eugene W. Coughlin, Longest Tenured Director of the Soldiers' Chorus

1950: Coughlin Hired as a Vocal Soloist

In 1950 the Army Ground Forces Band was redesignated as The United States Army Field Band. Its mission remained unchanged, and Arthur V. Donofrio continued directing the glee club, which would soon be known as the Soldiers' Chorus. As the Army Field Band toured the nation, they crossed paths with their new baritone soloist and future chorus director, Eugene Coughlin.

After World War II, Coughlin was a member of the San Francisco Opera Company, and served as a public relations specialist in the Sixth U.S. Army Information Office in San Francisco. According to Chief Warrant Officer 3 (retired) Robert Sanner and Sergeant Major (retired) Dan Greco, the Field Band was on a West Coast tour in Spring 1950 when Chester Whiting heard Coughlin sing at the Hollywood Bowl and invited him to join the band.¹¹ Coughlin came to the Army Field Band in 1950, where he was a featured baritone soloist for the next seven years. Sergeant Major (retired) Joe Greco (brother of Dan Greco) remembered, "He was a super-talented vocalist and later conductor. In the early days, when he sang all of the great operatic numbers, he'd tear the house down. He had a great and powerful voice and was so good he could have sung with the Metropolitan Opera Company." Frank Granofsky elaborated: "He had a very thorough knowledge of music and vocalization and as a baritone had the same quality as Lawrence Tibbett. He was that good."¹²



Eugene Coughlin sings in the chorus (front row, 4th from left). Original caption: "M/Sgt. Arthur V. Donofrio, Silver Spring, rehearses members of the 'Soldiers' Chorus.'" Most of the other men are instrumentalists, including Frank Granofsky (timpani), front row, far right, Frank Whiting (trumpet), front row, 3rd from left, Dominick Macaluso (trombone), front row, far left, and Ralph Lanning (cello), back row, far left. (Source: Sunday Star Magazine, 29 Apr 1956)



SFC Eugene Coughlin, baritone soloist.
(Photo courtesy of Ken Boyer)

Service in World War II:

Coughlin grew up on a farm in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota and studied voice at Concordia College and the Los Angeles Conservatory. While in Los Angeles, he performed on movie soundtracks, and with the Ken Darby Singers, the Westinghouse Chorus and the Los Angeles Symphonic Band, in addition to performing recitals at the Hollywood Bowl.

He enlisted in the Army Air Forces in November 1943 and served in the 493rd bomb group of the Eight Air Force in England. Aboard B-17s, first as a tail gunner, then as a bombardier, he completed 26 combat missions during the War.¹³ After bombing runs over Germany, he would sing *Old Man River* on the way back to England. His son Patrick recalled "He'd sing it over the plane's intercom, and the crew considered it their good luck piece as they returned from their mission." His plane was shot down twice, once in occupied France. Sergeant Major (retired) Frank Granofsky, Coughlin's longtime friend, relayed the story: "They landed in a field, and the local citizens gathered enough gasoline so they could take off, but not before Gene gave his parachute to a young woman so she could make her wedding dress out of the parachute's silk."



Chester Whiting (far right) leads bows. Eugene Coughlin is on the right of the group of soloists from a production of songs from "Oklahoma." (Source: The David Whiting Collection)

Soldiers Chorus Popular Feature

Hollywood Bowl, Carnegie Hall and the largest and greatest theaters of Europe and England have resounded to applause for the famed "Soldiers Chorus" of the U.S. Army Field Band of Washington, D.C. Credit for the forming and continued perfection of this unique vocal group belong to M. Sgt. Arthur V. Donofrio of Branford, Conn.

From a nucleus of five or six singers evolved the present 30-voice "Soldiers Chorus" which has been heard from Maine to California and in England, Europe, Canada and Mexico. Members of the chorus are actually instrumentalists who double in brass as singers.

Donofrio's group has also appeared on the Paul Whiteman show and were features in a Warner-Pathe movie which was released nationally. As a result of his outstanding work with the chorus Donofrio, in 1946, received from Gen. Jacob L. Devers, then commander of Army Ground Forces, the Commendation Ribbon with Medal Pendant as a tribute to his accomplishments in music.

The Montana Standard, 2 July 1954. The chorus is now consistently referred to as "the Soldiers' Chorus" in print media.

1957: Coughlin Named Director of the Soldiers' Chorus

When Master Sergeant Donofrio left the Army in 1957, Coughlin became director of the Soldiers' Chorus, a position he held for 17 years before retiring as a Sergeant Major. He was known for developing the Chorus into a world class ensemble that could travel and perform independently of the Concert Band. Due in part to the efforts of Robert Bierly, the Field Band's commanding officer from 1960-1966, the Army authorized an increased number of separate choral positions, providing enough to fill the Soldiers' Chorus with 22 dedicated vocalists.¹⁴ As former Commander and Conductor Colonel (retired) Hal Gibson later explained: "The Soldiers' Chorus evolved under the direction of Gene Coughlin, who molded his fledgling group into a truly professional ensemble that was a separate entity within the band. It ranked among the finest of all of our military musical organizations."¹⁵



Coughlin conducts in the mid 1960s.
(Source: US Army Field Band Archives)



(Above) Coughlin conducts the Concert Band and Soldiers' Chorus during a performance in Anchorage, Alaska in 1967.

(Source: US Army Field Band Archives)



Major Hal J. Gibson
Director, Army Band

Sgt. Major Gene Coughlin
Director, Soldiers Chorus



Coughlin conducts the Soldiers' Chorus separately from the band.

(Source: US Army Field Band Archives)

Known as the "Kings of the Highway," the Field Band travels thousands of miles each year on two major tours and is considered by music critics to be one of the most proficient musical organizations now appearing before the public.

The 100-member band, conducted by Major Hal J. Gibson, is the official touring musical representative of the Department of the Army.

Its audiences annually total nearly one million.

The 22-member Soldiers Chorus, directed by Sergeant Major Gene Coughlin, was formed in 1946, and travels with the Field Band, presenting its own special arrangements of all-time favorites and currently popular compositions.

(Above) Excerpts from *The Sheboygan Press*, 16 April 1968: "Army Field Band, Soldiers' Chorus to Present May 5 Concert in City."

Dented Iron Curtain

In 1957 the U.S. Army Field Band became the first touring military band to perform in Portugal, Norway, Denmark and Monaco. It was also during this tour that the band was the first service band to perform in concert in Yugoslavia, a significant cultural dent in the Iron Curtain.

Less than a year later, the Army's musical representatives were overseas again; this time in an all-airborne trip in which they presented 45 concerts in Hawaii, Japan, Korea and Okinawa.

In the United States, the Field Band was the first military band to present a full-dress concert in Carnegie Hall.

It has performed in the Hollywood Bowl, the San Francisco Opera House, two Worlds Fairs, and has marched in four presidential inaugural parades, escorted the President on special occasions and entertained many visiting heads of state.

The Soldiers Chorus has also performed at two Worlds Fairs, and was honored in 1961 by being chosen to perform at the prayer breakfast for the late President John F. Kennedy following his inauguration.



"14 Dec 72: To SGM Gene Coughlin and the Army Field Band Soldiers' Chorus for whom First Army has the highest regard--our admiration and appreciation for your great musical talents, patriotism, and achievements. You are all fantastic!" Signed C.E. Hutchin, Jr., Lt. General, US Army. (Photo courtesy of SGM retired Loran McClung)



The Soldiers' Chorus c.1972. (Source: US Army Field Band Archives)



THE SOLDIERS' CHORUS
SERGEANT MAJOR EUGENE COUGHLIN, DIRECTOR
a unit of
THE UNITED STATES ARMY FIELD BAND
Washington, D.C.

During and after Coughlin's tenure, the Soldiers' Chorus was considered a separate component of The United States Army Field Band. (Source: US Army Field Band Archives)

Coughlin and the Bicentennial Band

For the last two years of his career, 1974-1976, Coughlin was assigned to the United States Armed Forces Bicentennial Band, a joint-services band and chorus formed to tour and perform for the United States' Bicentennial. His experience touring was a major asset to the organization. In his book *The United States Armed Forces Bicentennial Band and Chorus: A Long Look Back*, Richard W. Johnson wrote:

For approximately half of the band, touring was a taste of something new...for others, being on the road was the way to live. Many had performed with touring bands before...Chief among the old timers was the Command Sergeant Major. Gene Coughlin had been in World War II as a bombardier in a B-17, and when he donned his dress uniform, the golden hash marks, each denoting three years of service, ran from his cuff halfway up his arm. He had been touring with the Army Field Band for a quarter of a century when he joined the Bicentennial Band. An outstanding vocalist in his younger days and later a distinguished conductor who built and directed the Soldiers' Chorus, there was little about a touring band, from the intricacies of advance work to sponsor relations, that he did not know. He rode with the commander and conductor in car number one, the front car, and no matter where the band went he had been there before.¹⁶

**The Late 1960s:
THE SOLDIERS OF SONG
Directed by Ron Ware**

In the 1960s, The United States Army Field Band had enough personnel to conduct tours with the Concert Band and Soldiers' Chorus and leave a core group of Soldiers back at Ft. Meade, enabling the unit to cover other commitments. Eventually, the larger touring components were able to shorten their tours—which were sometimes as long as 80 days—while the unit maintained the same total number of performances.

In 1965, the Field Band's executive officer Wilmont Trumbull directed Specialist Six Ron Ware to draw from this group of personnel to form another choral ensemble, which became known as the "Soldiers of Song."¹⁷ Its instrumental counterpart, created in 1966, was dubbed the "Ceremonial Detachment."

SONG SOLDIERS GIVE CONCERT HERE FRIDAY

The Soldiers of Song, an elite section of the "internationally famous" United States Army Field Band, which will present an "extra special" concert at the Visitor Center at a Tank Corps Reunion session, Saturday at 2:30 p.m., was organized in January, 1965. Comprising specially selected vocalists, the chorus has a primary mission acting as goodwill ambassadors for the Department of the Army. Since its inception, in 1965, this ensemble has toured the Eastern United States, winning many friends for the Army and drawing rave reviews from civilian and military critics alike.

In its short history, the Soldiers of Song has acquired a long list of credits, including performances for the President, Vice-President, cabinet members, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and many foreign dignitaries. In 1966, the chorus was featured over nationwide television in the annual Veterans Day ceremony from Arlington National Cemetery. In 1967, its Christmas program was televised throughout the Baltimore-Washington area. Its series of concerts in the schools of the vicinity have brought the finest in choral music to thousands.

MILITARY BEARING

In presenting their programs, the Soldiers of Song adeptly combine military bearing with a high degree of showmanship. In addition to special renditions of well-known compositions, they add color and variety to their shows by featuring specialty acts. These include The Folksingers, a popular folksong duo. The Troubadors, a quartet that has mastered many styles of music, and The Hayseeds, a country and western group headed by former Grand Ole Opry singer, Jim Tarleton.

Directed by Specialist Ron Ware, the Soldiers of Song has earned an enviable reputation. Ware's colorful narration, witty monologues and superb musical leadership have been a major factor in this group's move to the forefront of military choral organizations.

The Soldiers of Song performed locally and in nearby states for ceremonies, schools, and high profile venues such as the Tomb of the Unknowns and DAR Constitution Hall. From the *Gettysburg Times* on 9 July 1968: "In its short history, the Soldiers of Song has acquired a long list of credits, including performances for the President, Vice President, cabinet members, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and many foreign dignitaries. In 1966, the chorus was featured over nationwide television in the annual Veterans Day ceremony from Arlington National Cemetery...Its series of concerts in the schools of the vicinity have brought the finest in choral music to thousands."

The Soldiers of Song contained a number of small ensembles, including the Troubadors*, the Folksingers, and the Hayseeds—a Country and Western trio that featured former Grand Ole Opry singer James Tarleton.



The Soldiers of Song. Ron Ware is pictured front row, far right. (Source: US Army Field Band Archives)

(Left) The *Gettysburg Times* describes the Soldiers of Song, including the small ensembles the Folksingers, the Troubadors, and the Hayseeds. 9 July 1968. *Note: "Troubadors" appears in print and on photo labels even though the usual spelling is "Troubadour."



(Above) The Ceremonial Detachment under the direction of Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ralph West (far left) performed both independently and together with the Soldiers of Song.



The Soldiers of Song with Ron Ware (far left).

Ron Ware, Director of the Soldiers of Song

Another enlisted conductor who impacted the development of the Soldiers' Chorus, Specialist Six Ronald F. Ware served with The United States Army Field Band from 1962-1968. In 1965, he was asked to help establish a chorus with the 25th Infantry Division at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. After spending seven months lending his expertise, he returned to the Field Band where he directed the Soldiers of Song and performed in several of its small groups. In the years since, small ensembles have played a major part in accomplishing the Field Band's mission.



The Troubadors in 1968. Larry Johnson (front). L to R: Will Christoffels, James Porter, Will Stephens.



The Folksingers: Robert Hanitchak (L) Lee Gaffney (R).



The Hayseeds in 1966. L to R: Lee Gaffney, Ron Ware, James Tarleton.



The "Overland Singers:" Bob Hildreth (L) and Joe Peterson (R). Another vocal small ensemble from the late 1960s, they often performed with the Soldiers' Chorus. Natives of Valparaiso, Indiana, Hildreth and Peterson formed the Overland Singers before entering the Army, when they toured the United States, appeared on television, and recorded albums with Overland Records, Victor, RCA, United Artists, and Delta. Hildreth and Peterson joined the Army Field Band in 1967 and Glenn Coble, the third member of their group, joined in 1968.

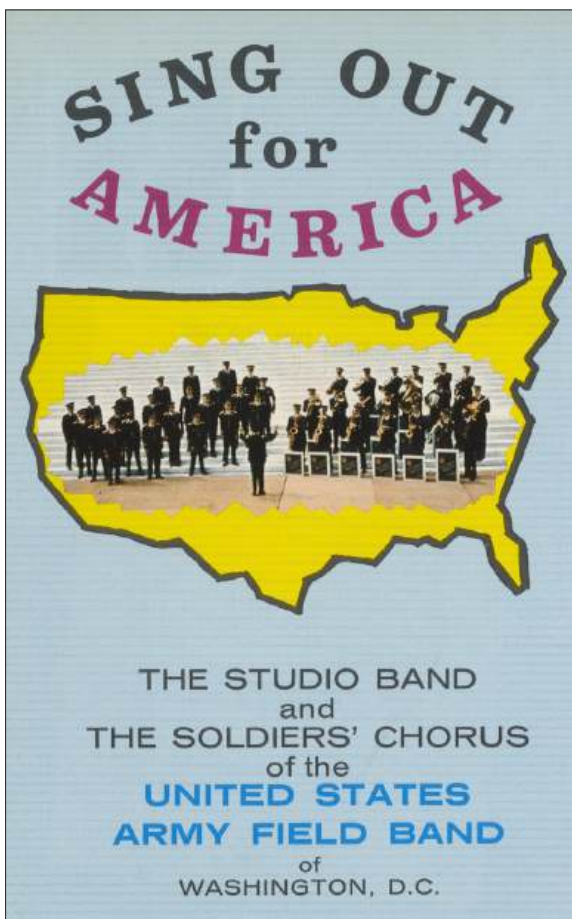
(All photos on this page from the US Army Field Band Archives)

1971-1974: SING OUT FOR AMERICA

In 1971, Hal J. Gibson, the Field Band's commanding officer, conceived of a way to reach out to young people that would take advantage of the capabilities of both the Soldiers' Chorus and the Studio Band—the Field Band's jazz component which had been founded in 1969 and would later become known as the Jazz Ambassadors. From a Field Band press release: “‘Sing Out for America’ is for us a totally new concept. It is our desire to communicate with the youth of America and to share with them the deep-seated pride, respect, and love that we have for our nation.” An article from the *Sheboygan Press* on 6 May 1972 summed it up as follows: “‘Sing Out’ presents the works of yesteryear’s classical and show tune giants with the versatile compositions of today’s young, creative composers...so far, the official record shows 38 performances and a total of 120 standing ovations...because of the inclusion of ‘young’ sounds, the show seemed tailored for high school and college audiences, but in the vernacular, ‘everyone seems to be digging it.’”

During its tours from 1971 to 1974, “Sing Out” featured a number of soloists, including vocalists Robert Throne, Dennis Blanchard, David Tucker, Lance Sweigart, and Robert Hildreth, and trumpeter Larry Skinner. In addition, a new folk trio called the “Volunteers” played a prominent role. Recruited into the Soldiers' Chorus in 1970 as a group, Dennis Blanchard, Tom Walrond, and Dennis Green had formed their skilled and entertaining trio, known then as “The Lost Flavor,” while students at Wayne State University in Detroit.¹⁸

“Sing Out for America” was very well received, and Army leadership insisted that LTC Gibson continue the production.¹⁹ In 1973, Gibson formed a group called the “Satin Brass”—made up of 13 brass players and a five player rhythm section—which performed the show with the Soldiers' Chorus during 1973 and 1974.



Courtesy of Marianne Donnelly.

Free Tickets Available ...

Army Musicians To Invade City

A totally unique musical revue under the banner of the U.S. Army Field Band is coming to Sheboygan on Saturday, May 6, at the Municipal Audi-

crueters, the concert is open to the public. Free tickets are now available for the performance scheduled for 8 p.m.

day, the concert is titled “Sing Out For America.”

The show, created by Lt. Col. Hal J. Gibson, commanding officer and conductor of

gram is to make clear that the Army is continually striving to meet the demands placed upon it by a modern, changing society. The key word is modern, says Col. Gibson; it's what the show is all about.

Additionally, Col. Gibson points out that the program shows another side of the Army that seldom is treated by the press or broadcast media.



Pop-Folk Trio

The Volunteers, a pop-folk trio, will be appearing today with the U.S. Army Field Band at Austin Peay State University. The members are Sp-5 Dennis H. Green, Sp-5 Dennis D. Blanchard and Sp-5 Thomas A. Waldron.

(Above) Excerpt from the *Sheboygan Press*, 12 April 1972.

(Left) The Volunteers featured in *The Leaf Chronicle* (Clarksville, TN), 10 Oct. 1971.

(Right) SGM Eugene Coughlin was the narrator for the *Sing Out for America* productions.



THE FIRST WOMEN PERFORM WITH THE UNITED STATES ARMY FIELD BAND

In 1971, the first female soldiers performed with The United States Army Field Band. After auditions which were open to the entire Women's Army Corps, two female vocalists were selected to join the band on the 1971 Sing Out for America tour: Specialist Four Mildred Christian, and Private First Class Johnnie B. Riser.²⁰ For "Sing Out" in 1972, Mildred Christian returned, joined by Specialist Four Cynthia Y. Stephens, Specialist Four Marianne Donnelly, and Private Ann E. Sanburn.

(Right) In 1972, Coughlin conducts the Soldiers' Chorus with their four female vocalists.

(Photo courtesy of Marianne Donnelly)



REFERENCE OR OFFICE SYMBOL	SUBJECT		
	Women's Army Corps Vocalists Assignment to the U S Army Field Band		
TO	FROM	DATE	CMT 1
Commanding Officer - CB	Commanding Officer	15 July 1971	
	US Army Field Band		
	Ft Geo G. Meade, MD 20755		
1. The United States Army Field Band, in conjunction with DCSPER-DWAC (Incl 1) and OCINFO-CRD (Incl 2), recently held an army wide competition to obtain two talented vocalists from the Women's Army Corps. Winners of the competition will spend 90 days TDY with the Studio Band and Soldiers' Chorus of the United States Army Field Band for rehearsal and completion of the fall 1971 concert tour.			
2. SP4 Mildred Lee Christian, [redacted] 35th Artillery Brigade, Baltimore and Washington STRACOM, Ft George G. Meade, Maryland, has been selected to fill one of the vocalist positions with the Studio Band and Soldiers' Chorus. She is an extremely talented, personable young lady, and will make a significant contribution to the success of the up coming tour through the Southwest.			
3. Request SP4 Mildred Lee Christian be placed on TDY for duty with the United States Army Field Band. Period of TDY with the band would be 90 days commencing 1 August 71.			

(Above) A memorandum informing Mildred Christian's commanding officer of her selection for the 1971 Sing Out for America tour. (Source: U.S. Army Field Band Archives)



(Above) In 1972 (L to R): SP4 Cynthia Y. Stephens, SP4 Marianne Donnelly, PVT Anne E. Sanburn, SGT Mildred Christian.

(Source: US Army Field Band Archives)



A THRILLING PROGRAM by the Studio Band and Soldiers' Chorus of U.S. Army Field Band drew a huge crowd of approximately 3,500 to Sheboygan Municipal Auditorium Saturday night. At the right is Lt. Col. Hal Gibson, creator and conductor of the unique collection of contempo-

rary music, "Sing Out For America:" at the left is part of the jazz ensemble and in the background is the chorus augmented by four WACs. The concert was sponsored by The Sheboygan Press and local Army recruiters. — (Clair Kilton Photo)

Musical Units Perform Here . . .

3,500 'Surrender' To Army

(Above) On 8 May 1972, Shirley Jarvis wrote in the Sheboygan Press: "Sing Out for America was a tingling combination of contemporary music with something for every taste. The band produced electric effects, the chorus was in turn mellow and exciting, and the parade of soloists--vocal and instrumental--was excellent."

1974: TRANSITION TO A MIXED CHORUS

By 1974, Sing Out for America was in its final iteration and the Field Band's focus had returned to national tours with its main performing components—the Concert Band, Soldiers' Chorus, and Studio Band. The Soldiers' Chorus had traveled for the first time as a separate touring entity in 1972, performing at the United States Military Academy during the five day trip. In 1973, they conducted their first major cross country tour without the Concert Band—a 23 day trip during which they performed a joint memorial concert with the Women's Army Corps Band following the death of President Lyndon B. Johnson.

In 1974 Eugene Coughlin transferred to the Bicentennial Band—where he would finish his Army career two years later—and the Soldiers' Chorus received its first commissioned officer as director: Captain Vincent R. DiFiore. The United States Army Field Band began permanently integrating women into its ranks, ushering in the transition from men's chorus to mixed chorus. The first four women were permanently assigned to the unit in the Spring and Summer of 1974, and were members of the Soldiers' Chorus:

Laurie (Calderwood) Cook, arrived 3 May 1974
Colleen Kiely, arrived 28 May 1974
Karen (Stoppelbein) McElwee, arrived 22 August 1974
Jatana (Miller) Vanek, arrived 22 August 1974

Eight other women joined the Soldiers' Chorus during the 1970s:

Deborah (Menzel) Price, arrived December 1974
Linda (Hildreth) Garrett, arrived February 1975
Cheryl (Spitz) Pietsch, arrived March 1975
Jeannie Stevens Jones, arrived 11 November 1975
Eileen (Granofsky) Lyle, arrived July 1976
Sandra Nicolai, arrived 6 January, 1977
Joyce (Olsen) Stoppelbein,
arrived 30 May 1977
Lisa (Fjoslien) McElwee,
arrived 5 November 1979



(Above) *The Soldiers' Chorus in 1975 with their director, CPT Vincent DiFiore.*
(Photo courtesy of SGM retired Jatana Vanek)



(Left) *The Soldiers' Chorus in 1977.*
(Photo courtesy of SGM retired Loran McClung)

The transition to a full mixed chorus took time since women were only hired into the soprano and alto sections as positions became available. This involved use of TTBB (Tenor 1, Tenor 2, Baritone, Bass) choral arrangements—with female vocalists doubling the male parts in different octaves—until the alto and soprano sections were complete. Soprano section leader Jeannie Stevens Jones and alto section leader Jatana Vanek prioritized recruiting and auditioning highly qualified vocalists until, by the mid-1980s, the Soldiers' Chorus was a complete mixed chorus. It took its place as one of the preeminent of its kind and hearkened back to the Ft. Meade mixed chorus from 1944.



The Soldiers' Chorus c.1980 with their director, CPT Gary Lamb. (Source: US Army Field Band Archives)



The soprano section in the mid-1990s. L to R: Jacqueline Clarys, Jeannie Stevens Jones, Janet Hjelmgren, Maryann (Nagle) Fiaschetti, Shirley Azzolina, Martha Canipe. All six women served for at least 20 years. (Photo courtesy of SGM retired Jeannie Stevens Jones)

Appendix: OFFICERS IN CHARGE

Since SGM Eugene Coughlin's departure, all subsequent directors of the Soldiers' Chorus have been commissioned officers. The tradition of maintaining enlisted rehearsal conductors continues to the present day, as does the position of the Noncommissioned Officer-In-Charge, or NCOIC. Now known as the "Element Leader," this is usually the senior enlisted Soldier in the ensemble.

Enlisted Directors:

PFC Fritz Kurzweil 1945-1946
(1st Combat Infantry Band)

MSG Paul Kauriga 1946
(1st Combat Infantry Band & AGF Band)

MSG Arthur Donofrio 1944-1957
*(1st Combat Infantry Band, AGF Band,
US Army Field Band)*

SGM Eugene Coughlin
(Director from 1957-1974)

SP6 Ron Ware 1965-1968
(The Soldiers of Song)

Subsequent Directors:

CPT Vincent R. DiFiore 1974-1978
CPT Gregory S. Hulse 1978-1980
CPT Gary Lamb 1980-1984
CPT Virginia Allen 1984
LTC Frank A. Dubuy 1984-1988
LTC Robert McCormick 1985-1990
LTC Michael D. Pyatt 1991-1996
LTC Robert McCormick 1996-2001
LTC John Clanton 2001-2004
CPT Daniel Toven* 2004-2007
1LT Curtis Kinzey* 2007-2009
CPT Leonel Pena* 2009-2011
MAJ Dwayne S. Milburn 2012-2015
1LT Alexandra Borza* 2016-2017
CPT Joel DuBois* 2019-present

Enlisted Rehearsal Conductors:

SP7 Brian Coughlin
SGM David Tucker
SGM Jeannie Stevens Jones 1980s-1995
SGM Douglas Cox - early 1990s-2010
SGM William Gabbard 2010-2016
SGM Erica Russo* 2010-2016
SSG Charles Parris 2016
SFC Meghan Whittier Habibzai 2016-2018
SFC Jeremy Cady 2016-2019
SSG Heidi Ackerman 2016-2020
SFC Timothy Coombs* 2016-present

Noncommissioned Officers In Charge/Element Leaders:

MSG Jimmy Matthews
SGM Dennis Nordahl
SGM David Tucker
SGM Bob Barnett
SGM Joel Dulyea
SGM Joan Mercer
SGM Rob McIver*

*Personnel with an asterisk are still in active military service at the time of the writing of this article.

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By SFC Brian Eldridge, archivist/historian, The United States Army Field Band, 2021.

Dedicated to the men and women who served in the Soldiers' Chorus, past and present.

This article is not intended to be a comprehensive history of the Soldiers' Chorus, but a look at its origins through the tenures of its first directors, up until the point when it had been established as a professional mixed chorus and separate component of The United States Army Field Band. Many men and women in addition to those mentioned here were critical to those accomplishments and dedicated years of their lives to the organization.

Personnel in lists are referred to by the highest rank attained before leaving The United States Army Field Band. For most enlisted personnel, this is their highest rank, however many of the officers-in-charge listed on p.18 moved on to other assignments after serving in the organization.

Acknowledgments:

Special thanks to the following people for making this article possible:

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