

CODA



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Happy Holidays USAFMAA



World War II Bandsmen Muse on Musical Memories

By permission - By Senior Airman Theresa Donnelly, 81st Training Wing Public Affairs

KEESLER AIR FORCE BASE, Miss. (AFPN) - Retiree's Robert Barber, 84, and Douglas Pemberton, 82, took a trip down memory lane on a recent visit here. Barber, from Louisville, PA., and Pemberton, from Biloxi, Miss., are original members of the 502nd Army Air Force Band, the first band here.

While visiting the Keesler Heritage Center, the two men discovered a uniform worn by Barber when he played the cornet and served as band leader here from 1941 to 1944, and a photograph of that band performing on the march. They were able to pick themselves out of the photo nearly 60 years later.

The first Keesler Field Band was 125 musicians strong. Barber said, "For all of them, music was their full-time job. People thought we had an easy job," he said. "We didn't just have musicians but arrangers and copyists, too. People were surprised at how much work it was to run a band."

"We played for retreats, reviews, parades, visiting VIPs and any other formal ceremony," he explained. There was also a concert orchestra that broadcast from the St. Andrews Theater here. Back then, it was common for the musicians to play the popular music of the times at the officers and enlisted clubs, and at off-base events."

"We would send out groups of 30 or sometimes a small group of four or five," Barber recalled. "We went all over the place. The band performed as far west as Texas and as far east as St. Petersburg, Florida. Some band members even went to England."

Pemberton was one of those lucky musicians who performed in England. He played upright bass and the French horn in the band from 1941 to 1945, and again from 1948 to 1952. He said some of his fondest memories of those days are of playing with the likes of comedian Bob Hope, singers Al Jolson and Ella Fitzgerald, bandleader Jimmy Dorsey and trumpeter Louis Armstrong. Another experience he cherishes is the time he sat in with a band that came here to perform for the troops. "Their bass player had broken his arm," Pemberton said. "They asked me to fill in for him and wear his suit so I could match everyone else. I ended up playing in my uniform because his jacket was too big to fit me."

I Remember...

by Dick Daugherty

* Seeing **Bart Starr** play football at Lanier High School in Montgomery, AL. I also watched him play college ball. The 604th AF Band played at his graduation from ROTC at the University of Alabama. I wonder what happened to him?

* Going on a raid of an "Off Limits" club in London with the Air Police and London "Bobbies." We raided it once and then raided it again a few hours later. Guess what? We found the same airmen there both times. Fortunately, none were bandsmen! (They were probably in church or at the base library.)

* Deactivated the 525th AF Band at Donaldson AFB, SC. We sent most of our personnel, along with many instruments and our library, to Langley AFB, VA. At our deactivation party, I learned plans had changed and the band would remain. The next few months were a nightmare as we rebuilt the band!

* Playing a concert in Kansas City. After the performance, the band was invited to a private show in a nearby burlesque theater. A policeman was stationed at the door to keep out everyone else. It was really weird for **Vince** and me to be the butt of jokes by baggy pants comics from the stage! We were only used to the jokes by the comics in our trumpet section!

* Sitting on a restaurant stool just prior to my enlistment. Some guy asked me what my plans were after high school. I told him I was going into the Army and would try to get into a band. He said, "Go into the Army Air Force instead. In the Army, bands ride in trucks but the Army Air Force flies its bands." That conversation changed my life!

* Thinking I was a good judge of character and ability in the Air Force. There were two guys in the Academy Band that I swore would never amount to anything. Years later, I ran into them - **Ted Ashcraft** was a medical doctor and **Joel Folsom** was a professor of trumpet at Marshall University. As for me, I was peddling horns for two companies that later went out of business. So much for my judgement!

* Having **Leslie (Red) Muncaster** down by 3 match points in tennis. Then he started to cheat! He would hit the ball where I wasn't and ended up beating me. Not a good political move since I was his boss...but he still went on to a great career!

* Seeing the US Capitol for the first time. It was at night and several of us prospective bandsmen were on our way to Bolling in a U.S. Army Air Force truck. I was an 18 year old from rural Minnesota and, 54 years later, that image is still burned into my memory!

* Being advised by our liaison officer in Casablanca, Morocco that we should avoid the Casbah. As a dedicated Commander, I promptly went there to see if my troops had disregarded his suggestion. They had!

* Passing in review 8 or 10 times in succession in Academy parades designed to train the cadets. I related this story to **Bill Dries** and he topped it by telling about playing for 50,000 troops passing in review at Lackland, TWICE!

* Giving **Don Welborn** the negative of my favorite press photo to have prints made. He promptly folded it and put it in his pocket. Oh well, what can you expect from a singer?

* **Al Bader** playing the sax. I always thought his sax was flat. But, you should see it now! Smushed flat and hanging in a frame on his wall.

* Buying my first home for \$14,700. I had difficulty getting the papers for a GI loan until I called **Pierce Walters**. Within days, I had the stuff.

* The USAF Chief of Staff has a sign on his wall that says, "The mission of the United States Air Force is to fly and fight and don't ever forget it!" I used to think about that a lot when I was playing claves in a tenor band at an Officer's Club dance.

Dues! Dues! Dues!

It Is Dues Time Again! If you paid your dues before September, 2001, your Association dues of \$10.00 will be due on January 1, 2002. We will not be sending out notices! Please send your check to: USAF-MAA, c/o John Lemelin, 4230 Brushridge Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80918

An Old Man's

Observation! By Chuck Gardner

I have to tell y'all that living in this area I've experienced the most optimistic, friendly, family oriented, patriotic and wonderful people. Living out west all my life, I was led to believe how cold and unfriendly these people are supposed to be. Drivers, waitresses, retail sales clerks and high school kids are smiling and appear happy. It's difficult to explain their optimism because the events recently should prove otherwise.

Every day in the newspaper are memorial service announcements for members of families lost in the World Trade Center Towers. The reason for the delay is because families have a difficult time getting death certificates. There are no bodies and family members deny the loss of a loved one without a body. So many were from right here in Marlton, NJ who commuted to work everyday.

The pilot of one of the planes that crashed lived in Marlton and he left a wife and three kids. Then we had the anthrax. For two weeks I used rubber gloves to check our mail and sorted it in the garage. The Trenton and Hamilton Post Office distribution centers receive our zip code 08053. Our mailman still wears rubber gloves while delivering his route.

The fall leaves are in brilliant color this year!

(Editor's note: Chuck's new e-mail address is: duojazz@home.com)

E-Mail List Of Former Band Members

If you would care to be included on an e-mail list of former AF Bandsmen, please contact **Danny Hamilton**. The e-mail list was created in 1998 at the 1998 Reunion in Colorado Springs for the purpose of keeping in touch. For more information please contact Danny at: dannyhamilton@yahoo.com

DC-Metro Area Group

The Monthly Lunch Bunch met in Annapolis on 11/9/01. Those attending were: Bob Navarra, John Bosworth, Hal Ludwig, John Caughman and Carl Costenbader.

Spotlight On Cass Bielski

by Harry Gleeson

In these early years of the 21st Century, the choices in home entertainment are mind boggling, particularly when you realize that just 55 years ago, radio was king - and it was AM radio at that! And from 1945 on, the Army Air Forces Band was a national leader in AM radio and a pioneer in FM broadcasting.

In fact, the Band squadron for a while was officially titled "The AAF Band & Radio Production Unit" when then Captain George S. Howard was assigned additional duty as Chief of the Music and Radio Production Branch at AAF Headquarters in the Pentagon in December, 1945.

While Howard was the titular office head, the real work actually fell on the shoulders of three outstanding officers, producer-director Capt. Bob Keim, script writer Capt. Mark Meranda and an exceptionally talented young announcer, Lt. Cass Bielski.

Born in Ambridge, PA, Cassimer Bielski, Jr. was fascinated with radio as a youngster, and eventually wound up attending Ohio State University in Columbus, where he was quickly hired as a staff announcer at WOSU for the princely sum (in 1940) of \$100.00 per month.

He had enrolled in the Aviation Cadet program while a OSU student, was called up in December of '43, and trained as a navigator. He flew 33 B-17 missions in Europe as a member of the 359th Squadron. Rotated back to the States, he wound up in a desk job at the Army post in Greensboro, NC when a AAF Headquarters request for service members with prior civilian radio experience reached his desk.

He was transferred to DC for the job, but since an overage existed in the Pentagon office, he was assigned directly to the AAF Band at Bolling Field. In addition to the numerous live national radio broadcasts from the band's studios - transcriptions were still in their infancy and taping was still a few years away - Cass quickly also became the band's concert moderator, preparing and delivering scripts for the vast majority of the band's live public presentations, including many of the out of town highlight concerts.

When Cass arrived at Bolling in 1946, the primary radio program was the weekly "This Is Your Country" series on the Mutual Broadcasting System, a show which saluted a different state each week, had a run of 18 weeks and was hosted by a civilian announcer. That last practice ended at the conclusion of the series when Cass became the band's primary announcer.



In the USAF Band Orderly Room circa 1946
Left to Right - USAF Band Adjutant Lt. Helen Barnes, Lt. Cass Bielski and M/Sgt Mike McGivern.

Then there was "On Wings Of Song" which began its 13 week run on MBS, and of course the schedule killer - a five day a week live broadcast from the band's studios at noon which was based on a United Nations theme.

As if that wasn't enough, "Flight Into The Past" debuted on January 4th, 1947 on MBS for a 26 week run. It was so popular that it was extended to January of 1948. The program was initially carried by 68 MBS stations. By the time it was over, 268 stations featured it.

Then of course there were the broadcasts featuring the Air Force Concert Orchestra and the Singing Sergeants in live programs from both the Department of Commerce Auditorium (now the Departmental) and George Washington University's Lisner Auditorium. These began with the "Music In The Air" series on the Continental FM Network in 1947.

Cass and the USAF Band hit the "big time" on January 18th, 1948 when the first "Air Force Hour" broadcast, a groundbreaking show which was carried eventually by 308 network stations, plus worldwide by the Armed Forces Radio Network. "The Air Force Hour" eventually transitioned, first into "Serenade In Blue" and then "Serenade In Stereo." The recruiting program lasted well into the 70s, making it the longest running and most successful military radio program in history.

The band's 1950 concert tour of Europe brought Cass and the radio production team some different challenges because eight radio programs covering that time frame had to be taped in Europe, edited there and then flown back to the states just in time for broadcast. While the band's printed itinerary doesn't even mention the broadcast recordings, the Cass Bielski printed itinerary for the same trip is centered around those nationally distributed shows. He made the trip even though he had officially been transferred to the Pentagon late in 1949.

Leaving the AF after his tour in the Pentagon was over, Cass went into the "association" business in Washington,

eventually becoming the Executive Director of the DC Dental Society. At the same time, he began investing. Eventually those investments required his full attention, and his comfortable retirement home in Winchester, VA stands as testament to his success in that field.

Today his only frustration is the lack of appreciation for what was accomplished in the late 40s. "People don't realize how important that (broadcasting on radio) was. They don't understand because it's so hard for people today to put their minds back then. Even George (Howard) didn't really understand."

To help future generations remember and hopefully understand, Cass Bielski recently contributed to the Band Library several LPs of radio broadcasts from the 40s, and he continues to search for transcriptions from "The Good Old Days" of radio.

Election of Officers Coming Soon!

By Lou Kriebel

It is time to start thinking of who you would like to have as your officers for the next two years. (2002 - 2004) The elected officers will run our association in accordance with the By-Laws and Articles of Incorporation of the USAF Musicians' Alumni Association, Incorporated. The 1st Quarter, 2002 issue of the CODA will carry the names and addresses of the Nominating Committee members. Voting information will also be included. **Only paid members in good standing will be eligible to vote!**



Our heartfelt sympathy is extended to the families of the following Air Force musicians who have passed to their eternal rest.

Robert Holt

New Orleans, LA June 22, 2001

Howard H. Hayashi

Cave Creek, Arizona August 27, 2001

Van M. Smith, Jr.

Cocoa, Florida September 20, 2001

Peg Veltre

Sumter, SC November 22, 2001

A Short History Lesson!

In 1980, Herman Vincent (Vince) suggested to Col. George Howard that a Retired Air Force Band Leader group be formed to stay in touch. He was enthusiastic and suggested that Lou Kriebel, who had addresses of everyone be the first "Field Representative." RAFBLS (Retired AF Band Leaders Society) was formed, and a newsletter started called "The Band Bulletin" - written by Lou and published and edited by Harold Copenhaver (Sec/Treasurer). In 1988, Vince became editor of the newsletter. In 1990, Lou became President of the RAFBLS. During that same year Vince was appointed Vice President/Editor and changed the name of the newsletter to the CODA. Later it was decided to include the retired Band Superintendents in the Society. The name was changed accordingly to Retired AF Band Leaders and Superintendents Society. (RAF-BLSS)

Paul Lathem, in a 1986 phone conversation with Jim Roland suggested that some kind of get-together to honor Col. Howard, be accomplished. Jim called Vince and together they organized the first Retired AF Musicians' (RAFM) Reunion held in San Antonio in 1987. Vince was the chairman. This was done separate from and with no connection to the RAFBLSS, and there was no specif-

ic "rank" necessary to attend, other than being retired. So, now there were two, RAFBLSS and RAFM.

And so it went for years, with word spreading and enthusiasm building with each reunion. In 2000, a movement was started to "organize" the RAFM, similar to the RAFBLSS. At the suggestion of Herman Vincent, RAFBLSS decided to change its name once again, to include ALL former musicians, regardless of rank and regardless of time of service. An invitation went out to the WAF Band (who already has a superb organization with reunions) and the Drum and Bugle Corps (USAF and Academy, who also have their own organization and reunions).

And so we arrive today with one organization, USAFMAA, Inc. (USAF Musicians' Alumni Association). John Lemelin wrote the Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws, etc.

We hope all of the groups named above will do their best to join us at the 2002 reunion in Sacramento!

United States Air Force
Musicians' Alumni Association
Reunion 2002

Hyatt Regency Hotel

Sacramento, California
August 7 - 10, 2002

**Music Support By The
Travis AFB Band**

Contact: Richard Borden (909) 242-5463
or Larry Lawrence (707) 448-5852

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Notice

Your help is needed in locating musicians who have served in the Air Force Band Career Field for any length of time. Please make them aware of your Alumni Association, the CODA newsletter and the reunions that take place every two years.

Annual dues are only \$10.00. Send to: John Lemelin, Treasurer, 4230 Brushridge Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80918.

Reminder: The 2002 USAFMAA Directory is scheduled for publication early next year. John Lemelin has contacted people with e-mail addresses. All others need to contact him if changes are necessary. Phone: (719) 599-7934 or Fax: (719) 533-1825.

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