

Notes From

Public Affairs: Bands Division

Air Force Band Career Field Update

by Lt Col Mark Peterson

It's a cold, windy day here in Washington DC as I sit in my drab office in the Pentagon. The good news is that my telephone and computer are in great working order and they allow me to keep in touch with all the great Air Force band people we have across the country and in our overseas locations as they continue to provide great music to our troops and the general public.

First, I have some good news. The current band accessions freeze has been lifted and we are now being allowed to bring in up to 30 new members to fill critical vacancies between now and the end of September. The Air Force Personnel community expects that we'll be back to our normal number of authorizations by October 1, but getting the authority to hire 30 new musicians between now and then will go a long way toward addressing the problems bands have been facing due to manning shortages.

At this point, I'd intended to write about something else, but just received notice of the recent passing of one of our own, **Hank Uhland**. This brought home to me again how fortunate all of us are to have been a part of something as special as the Air Force band career field. We have had and continue to have such great people and musicians to work with and get to know beyond the "AF job."

I didn't know Hank very well, but well enough to know what a fine person and musician he was. It's also quite apparent from some of the e-mails I've received that he was very well liked and respected by his contemporaries. I have one story I'd like to share with you.

I was a Capt at the time, commander of the 724th AF Band at McChord. We were also known as the Air Force Band of the Pacific Northwest at the time. It was late 1990, General **McPeak** was our new Chief of Staff, and the number of US troops in Saudi Arabia was rising as the military prepared for Desert Storm. At that time, there were 20 Air Force bands, but we knew Gen McPeak was working on a plan to reduce the number of bands. Shortly after the start of the new year, US troops attacked with the intention to drive Iraqi soldiers out of Kuwait. About a week after that, band cuts were announced. Seven of our bands were slated to close by mid-year, including the 724th.

After the initial shock and dismay of having my first command deactivated, I began to work assignments for our people, figure out where the equipment and instruments would go and plan the band's final performances. For one of our final concerts, I decided to invite several previous commanders of the 724th to guest conduct the band. Three accepted the offer to come

back and all had remained in the Tacoma area after retirement. Captain **Bill Dries**, Warrant Officer **Bob Kaler**, and Warrant Officer **Hank Uhland**.

I invited them to join me at the McChord Officer's Club for lunch one day to talk about programming, rehearsals and the performance. I can't tell you how much I, as a fairly young Captain at the time, enjoyed visiting with these three gentleman and hearing some of their great war stories. All three stepped in front of the band, took up their batons, and crafted their music as if they had never been away from conducting for a day, much less for years. Judging by the expressions on their faces, I think they really enjoyed this last opportunity to be in front of that fine band.

These three gentleman are a part of the collective history of our Air Force Bands. Bob passed away a couple of years ago and now Hank has joined him. I'm sure you share similar memories of the great people you've known while on active duty. And although it's never pleasant to say good-bye to a friend, it is reassuring to know that they have left a positive impression on our band program and that your life is better for having known them. Good-bye Hank, and thank you.

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From Our AFMA Reunion Coordinator -- Phyllis Kohlenberg

Reunion 2006 We are still receiving survey sheets regarding Reunion 2006 that were included in the 3rd Quarter Coda. This is your opportunity to tell us what you want to do at the 2006 gathering in DC, so if you have not yet filled yours out, please do so now. If you have misplaced yours or did not receive one, please call, fax, or E-mail me and I will be happy to get one to you. As of now, there is no specific time limit, but we would really appreciate hearing from you ASAP.

Currently, we are working on bus quotes, as buses will be needed for a few events that are scheduled off-site. In the upcoming months, we will be meeting with the hotel to further discuss the arrangements. Also, I would like some input in designing a logo for the commemorative T-shirt. If anyone has any ideas, please draw them up and mail them to me.

If you have any questions about the D.C. Area or the Reunion, please call or E-mail me. The reunion is to see old friends and to make new ones, and I am

definitely looking forward to seeing everyone again.

Reunion 2008 Please see a related story in this CODA, and PLEASE vote for the location you prefer for 2008 – either Colorado Springs or San Antonio.

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