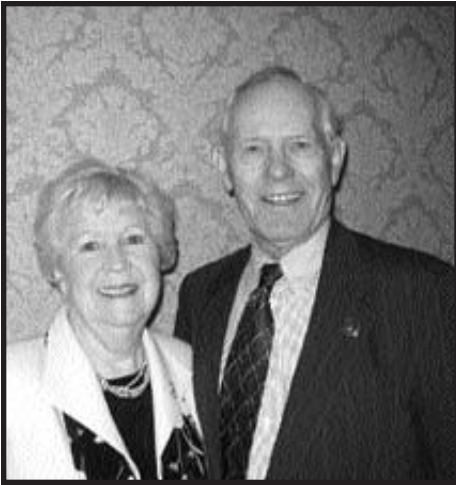


Spotlight on Jim McMillen

by Harry H. Gleeson



Jim and Louise

Quite often we “younger” troops hear from some of our more experienced peers that things were so different in the “old” days that they simply couldn’t be equaled today. Sometimes that’s a good thing, but sometimes we feel as though we may have really missed out on some amazing experiences.

The AF music career of Jim McMillen stands out as an example of a full and successful career that simply could not be duplicated today. For example, in his 21 years in AF Music, Jim had a total of 14 assignments (technically 15), served with 12 different AF bands, attended the AF Bandsman School at Bolling AFB twice, and rose from Private to CWO-W4!

Jim was born in Argos, IN in 1927. The family moved to Chicago, IL where he attended Lindbloom Technical High School. He graduated from HS through a GED test in 1946 while in the Army Air Forces.

But from now on, let’s let Jim tell the story. “I enlisted in USAAF on April 22, 1946. After basic training, I attended bandsmen school at Bolling AFB, DC where we performed for **President Truman** at the Independence Day parade in 1946. Assigned to the 745th AF Band, 15th AF Headquarters, Colorado Springs, CO. Reassigned to Smoky Hill AFB, Salina Kansas in 1947.

“Promoted to Staff Sgt. in 1949. Reassigned to the 724th AF Band, Mather AFB, Sacramento, CA in April of 1949. During that tour I attended the Advanced

Instrumentalist Course, Bolling AFB, DC and also attended Sacramento State College in off duty time. Reassigned to the 544th/545th band, ‘The Empire State Band,’ at Sampson AFB, Geneva NY in January, 1951 where I served as Assistant Bandleader and Solo Clarinetist and was promoted to Technical Sgt. in 1951. Performed for **Eleanor Roosevelt’s** appearance at the base.

“Reassigned to 574th/575th AF ‘Band of The Golden West,’ Parks AFB, CA in January, 1952. Served as Solo Clarinetist, Assistant Bandleader and NCOIC of Bandsmen Indoctrination School. Supervised four instructors and 80 students. Attended San Jose State College in off duty time, and performed and conducted a series of television programs at KPIX TV San Francisco.

“Assigned as NCOIC of forming and leading the composite Air Force Band for the 1953 Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena CA. Promoted to Master Sgt. in 1953 and was assigned as NCO Bandleader that same year. Formed and directed the AF Composite Band for the World Congress Of Flight at Nellis AFB, NV.

“Received appointment as Warrant Officer Bandleader in August, 1954 and reassigned to the 502nd AF Band, Keesler AFB, MS. Reassigned to the 519th AF Band, Keflavik, Iceland in May of 1955. Performed for **President Eisenhower** on his stopover on the way to NATO Conference in Paris, and for the **Bob Hope** Christmas Show that year.”

Promoted to CWO2 in 1955. Reassigned to the 3595th AF Band, Nellis AFB, NV in June, 1956. Performed for Las Vegas Night Of Stars featuring **Matt Dillon, Carol Channing, Gordon McCrae**, etc. Reassigned to the 541st AF Band, Williams AFB, AZ. Performed on clarinet with Phoenix Symphony Orchestra and attended Phoenix City College in off duty time.

“Reassigned to the 538th AF Band, Hunter AFB, GA in 1959. Performed with **Peggy King, Morey Amsterdam, and Johnny Desmond** at the United Community Appeal Telethon in Savannah, and also performed as 2nd Clarinetist and Bass Clarinetist with Savannah Symphony Orchestra. Directed the transfer of the band to McCoy AFB, Orlando FL in 1961. Promoted to CWO3 and received the AF Commendation Medal for outstanding music performances throughout southeastern US.

“Reassigned to the 600th AF Band, 13th AF Headquarters, Clark AFB, Philippines in May, 1963. Directed the band in performances throughout Southeast Asia, including Taiwan, Vietnam and Thailand. Performed for the SEATO Conference at Uban AFB, Thailand. Directed a concert tour of Thailand including performances in Bangkok and Cheng Mai.

“Appointed Assistant Director of Special Band for a tour of Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand including performances in Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Hobart, Auckland and Wellington in commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea. Conducted the combined musicians of the Quezon City Symphony Orchestra, the 13th AF Band and the base choir in performances of **Handel’s** ‘Messiah’ at Clark AFB and Manila. Proclaimed ‘Honorary Chief’ of aboriginal tribe in Taiwan. Received 1st Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster to AF Commendation Medal and promoted to CWO4 in 1965. Received the Outstanding Unit Award while Commander of 600th AF Band.

“Reassigned to the 573rd AF Band, 4th AF Headquarters, Hamilton AFB, CA in May, 1965. Performed for AF functions throughout central California. Retired to civilian life on August 1, 1967.”

Jim then entered San Francisco State College in September, 1967 as a full time student in music education, graduating Cum Laude in 1969. He next enrolled in Dominican College, San Rafael, CA to complete state teaching credential requirements. His teaching career began in 1969 at Novato Unified School District, Novato, CA, teaching elementary instrumental music at three elementary schools.

In 1971 he moved to Vista, CA where he taught music at San Marcos Junior High School and at three elementary schools. Jim received superior performance awards at annual festivals two consecutive years. He next became department chairman. Jim taught instrumental and vocal music for 16 years and retired from teaching in July, 1987. His teaching career had one more stop, however, because in 1989 he was recruited by the Bonsall School District to teach instrumental music for one year.

Jim and his wife of 56 years, Louise, are now fully retired and reside in Oceanside, CA. Jim is one of the original members of what has evolved into today’s Air Force Musicians Association.