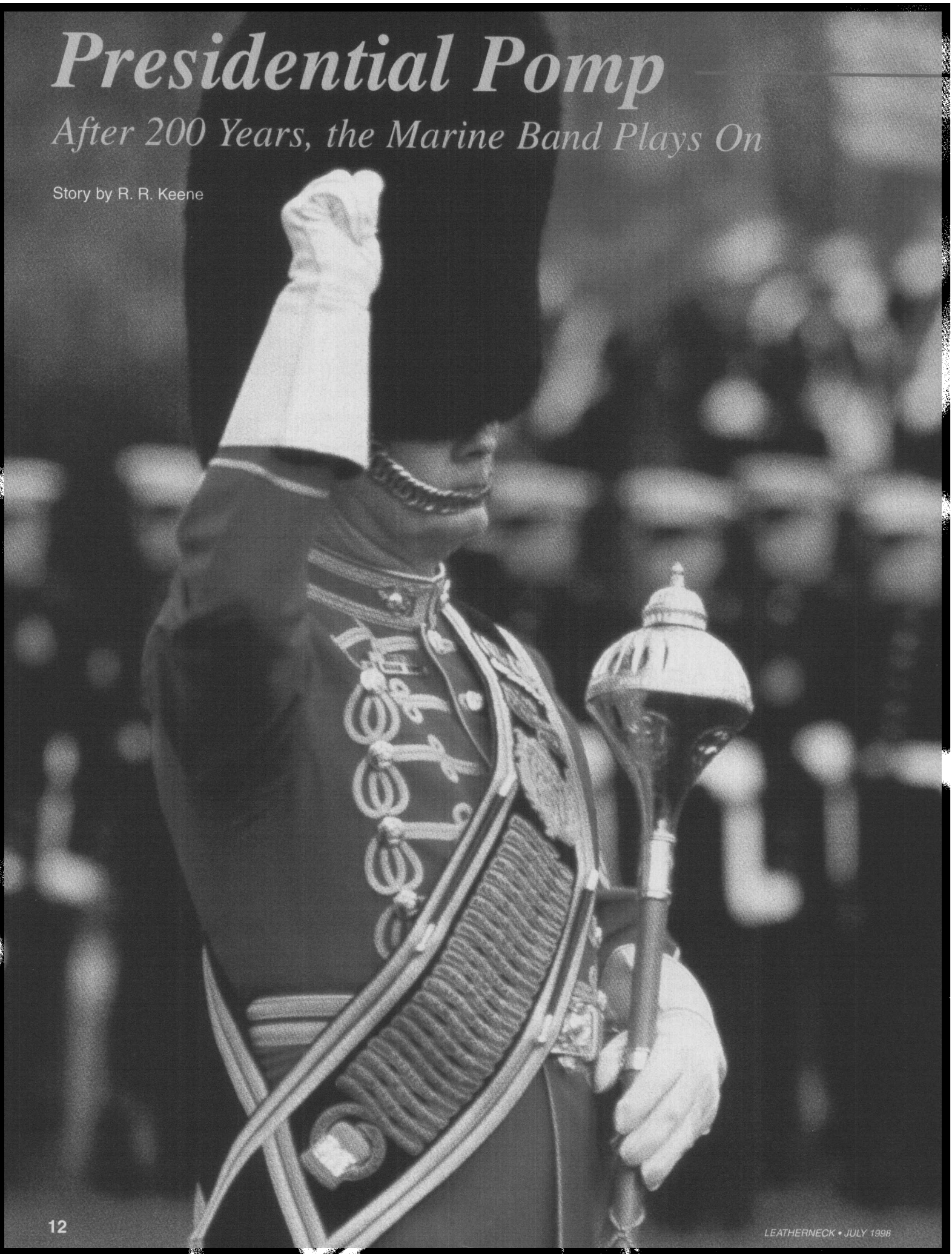
Presidential Pomp

After 200 Years, the Marine Band Plays On

Story by R. R. Keene



MGySgt Andrew Linden, United States Marine Band

It is another parade season at Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C. Lieutenant Colonel Timothy W. Foley (Oberlin Conservatory of Music, 1964), 26th director of the United States Marine Band, stands on the edge of the quadrangle of the oldest post of the Corps. He confers with Master Gunnery Sergeant Dennis R. Wolfe (Parris Island, 1976), 29th drum major of the Corps' oldest active unit known as "The President's Own," regarding details for an upcoming Friday Evening Parade.

Throughout the yard, Marines in creased khaki shirts and dark forest green trousers reflect tracers of sunlight off their shoes and the bills of their barracks hats. They drill with colors and standards cased, on a freshly sodded and manicured parade field.

It is late spring, and the morning air is pleasantly cool for garrison duties. Below the parapets of the barrack's 197-year-old brick masonry come the echoes of crisp commands and the cadence of leather soles moving as one down the well-worn portico where more than 10 generations of rank-and-file leathernecks have marched to drums whose roll goes back 200 years....

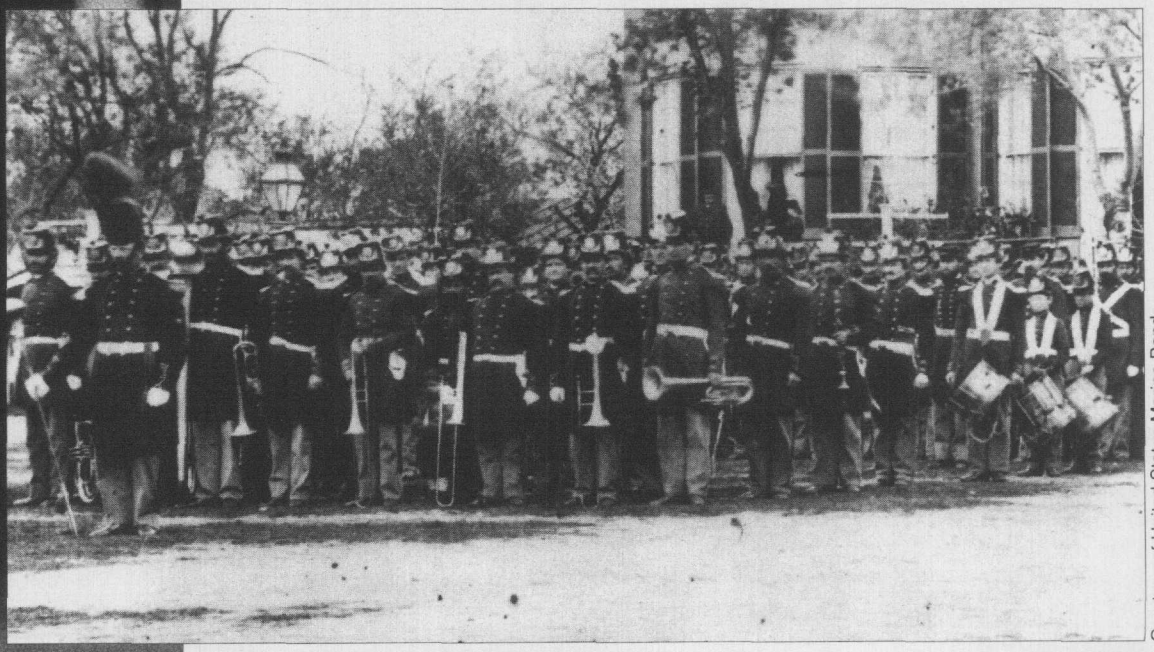
In 1798 the Corps needed fifers and drummers to sound general quarters for leathernecks and tars serving on America's men-of-war. The ships were sent to eliminate French cruisers and privateers which had been preying on commercial shipping along the country's Eastern seaboard. It was dangerous and deadly duty requiring disciplined men with a stomach for gore. Thus, the Corps also needed drummers for those who found themselves lacking. Floggings and sting of the lash were ceremoniously laid on to the tap of a drum.

Ashore, Major Commandant William Ward Burrows struggled to keep the Corps relevant as a fighting force in the face of a sometimes hostile Congress, who opposed the creation of a Marine headquarters. Then based in Philadelphia, Burrows reasoned that if he must command a small Corps, it should be elite and the epitome of military decorum. While the Marines he commanded showed spirit in battle, they were also plagued with drunkards and petty larcenists led by noncommissioned officers and officers lacking in military skills. Consequently, Burrows started recruiting and handpicking his officers.

He established his own supply system and served as the Corps' personal paymaster for more than a year. When the weather warmed, Burrows marched everyone outside Philadelphia where there was room to drill and drill some more. It also kept the men away from the fevers and flesh pots of the city. Further, Burrows dispatched Marines to guard military stores and French prisoners.

He then put the Marines on parade before the local gentry.

The most visible icon of the United States Marine Band is the drum major wearing a bearskin and holding his baton. With his appearance can "The President's Own" be far behind? The bearskin and baton have been traditional and appear in the earliest known photograph of the band taken at Marine Barracks in 1864.



Courtesy of United States Marine Band

Performing a concert at the Capitol, as in this 1992 event, has become one of many traditions established by the band in its 200-year history.

Acquiring a taste for publicity, the Commandant decided the Corps needed a band. He made it happen by ordering every officer to cough up $10 a month in order to fund the idea.

Accounts were squared to a man, and Burrows went to Congress for approval. On July 11, 1798, President John Adams signed into law an Act of Congress establishing the United States Marine Band. Burrows then placed the U.S. Marine Band ("one drum major, one fife major and thirty-two drums and fifes") under the baton of Drum Major William Farr, who started giving concerts in Philadelphia and Washington. The repertoire included old favorites such as "Yankee Doodle," "Rural Felicity," "My Dog and Gun" and "On the Road to Boston."

In 1800 when the Corps moved its headquarters to the new federal city of Washington, the band, after playing one of its last concerts in Philadelphia on Independence Day, moved, too.

At the time, Washington wasn't much of a city, let alone a capital. Set on the mosquito-infested banks of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, it was sweltering in the summer and just bearable in the winter. There were few cobbled streets. Travelers relied mostly on cow paths lined by clusters of crude shacks. Cattle grazed, pigs rooted, and fledgling politicians made promises. Over this, the "musicks" of the Marine Band played. It would be another century before another primary military band was established in the nation's capital.

Quite naturally the band became a hit with local residents by performing public concerts from its hillside encampment overlooking the Potomac near the future

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LtCol Timothy W. Foley (above) has been the band's director since 1996 and hopes to lead the band into the turn of the century. Prior to the turn of the last century the band recorded into 10 gramophone machines and onto wax cylinders as shown in this 1891 photograph at bottom of the page.

site of the Lincoln Memorial.

As word got around town, the concerts increased in popularity, drawing audiences which came to include President Adams and Vice President Thomas Jefferson. As the band acquired French horns, clarinets, oboes and a bassoon, it also became woven into the fabric of Washington's official and private social life. By New Year's Day 1801 the band was invited to make its White House debut at a reception given by President and Mrs. Adams. Playing at official and state functions became a tradition which continues even today.

But it was Jefferson who became the "Godfather of the Marine Band." Author of the Declaration of Independence and a framer of the Constitution, Jefferson was a Renaissance man and, according to his biographers, an "erstwhile violinist" who loved music almost as much as he loved language and politics. It was Jefferson who called the band "The President's Own" and had it perform for his inauguration on March 4, 1801. That, too, became a custom, and it has performed at every inauguration since.

The first Independence Day celebration in 1801 at what was then called the "President's House" was also the first time troops were reviewed by their Commander in Chief at his residence in Washington. It caused Margaret Baynard Smith, wife of a noted Washington publisher, to write: "Martial music soon announced the approach of the Marine Corps of Captain Burrows who saluted the President, accompanied by the President's March played by an excellent band attached to the corps."

In the meantime the band moved into the new barracks at 8th and I Streets Southeast, where it is quartered to this day.

The amicable relations between the band and the third President of the United States, no doubt, had its perks. However, it also allowed the President to have perhaps too much direct interest in the Corps' musicians. Jefferson is said to have cornered LtCol Burrows about the state of music in the capital. To Jefferson, the band was good, but could have been better. He believed the best musicians were found in Italy. Why not, he is reported to have asked Burrows, find some Italian musicians and have two bands, one American and one Italian? Burrows, being a good Marine, took it as an order.

Marine Captain John Hall was quickly dispatched in the frigate USS *Chesapeake* to recruit Italy's finest. He soon found Gaetano Carusi, who led a band at a Sicilian cantina. Hall signed up Carusi and 17 more musicians and their families, who made their way from frigate to frigate bound for the United States.

In the meantime, Burrows, because of ill health, had turned over command of the Corps to LtCol Franklin Wharton. Burrows either neglected or forgot to brief Wharton about Capt Hall's talent hunt.

It did not help that Wharton was a student of a sterner school. His officers received broad powers in administering punishments and court-martial. The Marine Band had a morbid role in this Commandant's tenure, too. During Wharton's reign a wartime deserter was escorted on Friday, Jan. 13, 1815, under guard, from the barracks, and while the Marine Band played the "Dead March," the deserter was made to stand beside an open grave and then shot.

Courtesy of United States Marine Band

So, it is not surprising that Wharton went into a rage when he received a letter from Capt Hall stating the barracks should prepare to receive 18 Italian musicians whom he'd enlisted, accompanied by their wives and children, none of whom spoke English. The letter went on to explain that one of the "recruits" was 9 years old, two were 10, and a fourth had just reached his 12th birthday. Wharton's rage, albeit understandable, neared apoplexy when he further learned that Hall was "obliged to give the Leader 50 Dolls. (sic) and the rest 10 Dollars Bounty, with a ration of 8 to their wives." Nor was Wharton's consternation any lessened to read Hall spent a "fortune" on "fine musical instruments."

The Commandant fired off a scathing letter which apparently never reached Hall, who upon landing at Hampton Roads, Va., wrote another letter to Wharton proudly stating he hoped the colonel would be pleased with the musicians.

In the end, almost nobody was pleased. Carusi, the leader of the Italian band, wrote that they had "arrived in a desert, in fact a place containing some two or three taverns, with a few scattered cottages or log huts, called the City of Washington."

Capt Hall was severely reprimanded at Headquarters and asked to explain his actions, although the band was brought to garrison.

Courtesy of United States Marine Band

The "March King" band director John Philip Sousa led the band from 1880 to 1892 and forever left his mark.

After consulting with the Secretary of the Navy, Wharton decided that the Italian band would live in quarters within the garrison and be under the same regulations as the "Old Band" had been. Wharton insisted that a Marine, even a virtuoso on the oboe, must be a Marine. Consequently, half the Sicilians were discharged and went back to Italy. The rest were absorbed into the Marine Band. One, Venerando Pulizzi, played for 21 years, eventually becoming the band's leader from 1818 to 1827. President Jefferson, who instigated the "Italian musician" concept, soon found other concerns of state by which to busy himself.

The gist of Jefferson's idea, importing foreign musicians, was not lost, however. Francis Marie Scala, a stocky 21-year-old from Naples who then spoke no English, arrived on board the cruiser *Brandywine* in 1841. "I was told they [the Navy] were seeking musicians," Scala would later recall in an interview. "I enlisted and was rated a third-class musician. I was soon playing clarinet on the quarterdeck."

Scala subsequently enlisted in the Marine Corps and soon learned to speak English. He also learned to like the ethnic diversity of the Marine Band and later recalled: "The nations represented in the band at that time were America, Germany, England, Spain, Italy and Austria. We had one flute, one clarinet, one French horn, two trombones, one bugle, one bass drum and one pair of cymbals. Not more than five men could read music." Scala did read music and eventually became director of the Marine Band from 1855 to 1871.

In the years after the Jefferson administration the band played on and continued to establish itself as a Washington

Selecting a Few Good Bandsmen From the Nation's Best Music Schools

Although things have changed somewhat over the years, the March King's standards of excellence have remained. Only a few members of the band, such as drum major Master Gunnery Sergeant Dennis R. Wolfe and MGySgt Charles V. Corrado (who with 10 service stripes and more than 41 years' combined service in the Marine Corps and Marine Band is the senior master gunnery sergeant in the Corps), have risen through the regular ranks to become members of the Marine Band. For the most part, today's musicians are graduates of the nation's most prestigious music schools and often hold advanced degrees in music.

As with any major symphony orchestra, prospects for the band are selected during an audition where they perform behind a screen to ensure anonymity. The audition committee makes its selection based on musical ability and a subsequent personal interview.

In keeping with Sousa's idea of offering salaries commensurate with comparable civilian orchestras, the majority of musicians enter via a four-year contract "for duty with the U.S. Marine Band only." They are promoted to the rank of staff sergeant and in place of crossed rifles below their chevrons wear the unique musicians' lyre distinctive of their 9811 military occupational specialty. More than 90 percent become career professionals who choose to serve with the band for 20 or more years.

Band members do not undergo training at the recruit depots, but rather report directly to Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C. Their indoctrination into the Corps becomes the task of the drum major who serves as mentor and is responsible for the on-site training in military subjects. He also oversees a structured program to help new members make the transition to the Marine Band. It is the musicians themselves who organize schedules, repair instruments, publicize events, archive music, photos and otherwise handle the myriad behind-the-scenes assignments and other duties essential to a successful performance. It's a hallmark of a well-organized 200-year-old military unit.

—R. R. Keene

Courtesy of United States Marine Band

Drum Major MGySgt Dennis R. Wolfe

Courtesy of United States Marine Band

Senior USMC MGySgt Charles V. Corrado

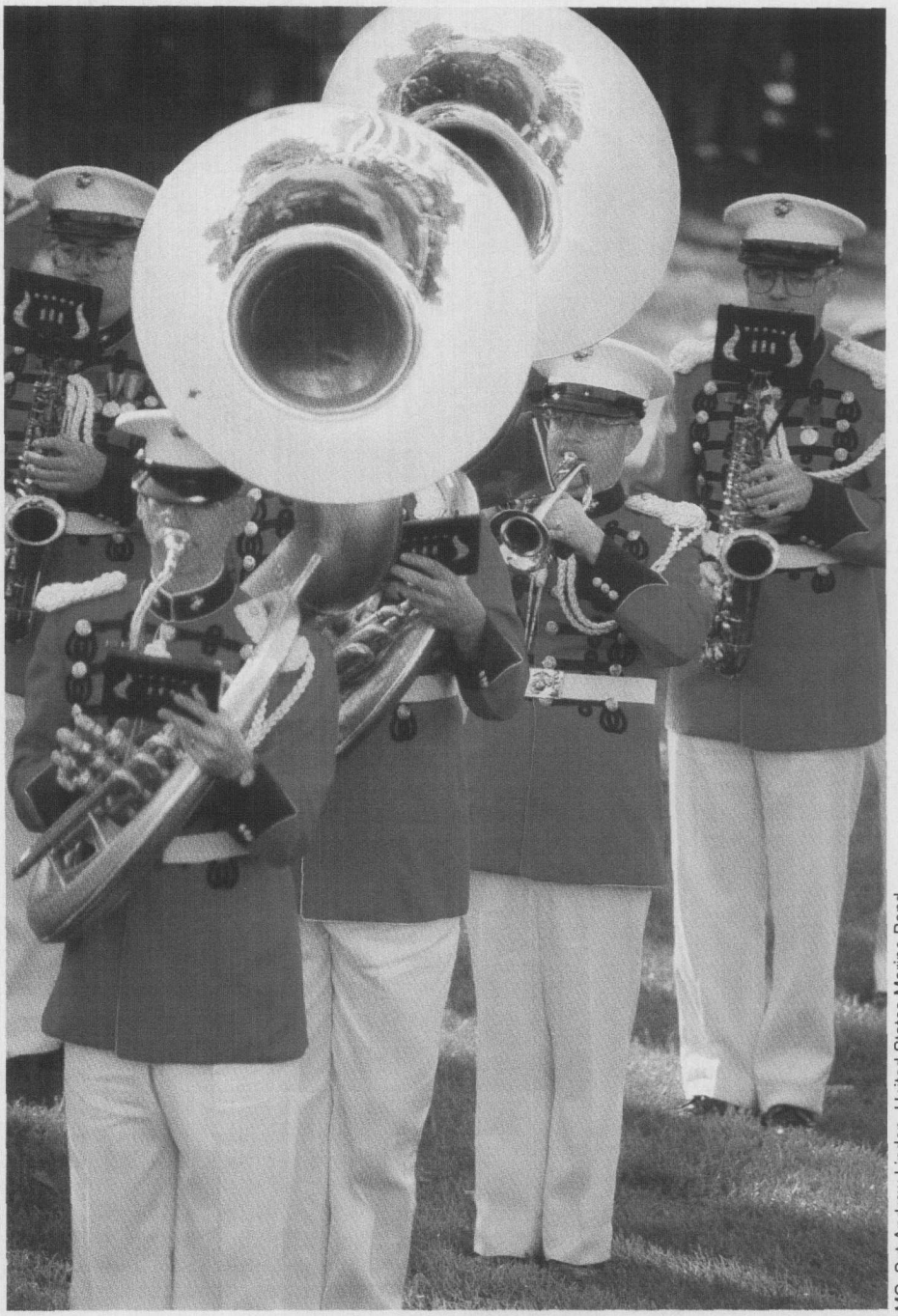
tradition. When James Madison succeeded Jefferson as President in 1809, the band provided the music for the first inaugural ball.

In 1816, at a Congressional dinner honoring naval heroes, one account states: "The dinner was followed by many toasts, accompanied by highly patriotic songs and music by the Marine Band." One, purportedly "hastily written song" by a Mr. Cutting was called "To Anacreon in Heaven." Eight years later off Fort McHenry, Md., Francis Scott Key wrote new words to the tune, and it became better known as "The Star-Spangled Banner."

In 1825, President John Quincy Adams gave the first White House toast to the Marquis de Lafayette and later introduced dancing at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. to music performed by the Marine Band.

Adams was accompanied by the Marine Band on July 4, 1828, for the opening of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. The band, floating on a barge, honored him by playing "Ruffles and Flourishes" derived from an old Gaelic air. It later became the standard tune used to announce the arrival of the President at state functions. It was followed by a gallant-sounding tune from James Sanderson's 1812 musical titled "The Lady of the Lake," better known today as "Hail to the Chief." (However, it was not until First Lady Julia Tyler instructed the Marine Band to play "Hail to the Chief" whenever President John Tyler made his official appearance that the tune was used as official presidential honors.)

The Marine Band's association with the Presidents continued to grow. When Andrew Jackson was sworn into the office in 1829, he became the first to do so on the steps of the Capitol, and the band was right there with him. It was Martin Van Buren, the eighth U.S. President, who started the tradition of formal outdoor concerts on the Capitol grounds. When his successor, William Henry Harrison, died after one month in office in 1841, the Marine Band led the funeral procession that extended two miles along the streets of the nation's capital. That, too, became a tradition. It would similarly play slow-marched dirges for other Presidents including Zachary Taylor, Abraham Lincoln, James A. Garfield, William McKinley, Warren G. Harding, Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. On a happier note, they would also play at the White House weddings of Nellie Grant, Alice Roosevelt and Lynda Bird Johnson (who married Marine Barracks, Wash., Capt and now Virginia Senator Charles Robb).



MGySgt Andrew Linden, United States Marine Band

From parades on New York's Manhattan Island to performing, as pictured, on the south lawn of the White House, "The President's Own," while primarily a concert band, is also often on the march.

Scala was still band leader when Lincoln took office on a windy Monday in March 1861. That night the band played for the Union ball in a temporary building behind City Hall. The mood was far from festive for war had broken out. The band was with Lincoln two years later at Gettysburg for the dedication of the National Cemetery and two years after that at Lincoln's second-term inauguration following the end of the Civil War. As Lincoln spoke of national reconciliation and later shook hands for two hours, the Marine Band played, as it had all during the war, to help bolster morale.

By the time Charles G. McCawley became Colonel Commandant of the Corps in 1876 the band, under the tenure of its last two directors, had lost much of its musical and martial edge. Part of the problem was recruiting. As the city of Washington became more cosmopolitan, other bands were formed, and a skilled musician could make twice the pay of a leatherneck bandsman. Further, the members of the Marine Band had shifted away from military duties and "abhorred marching."

McCawley, who was under pressure from Congress to justify the Marine Corps' existence, also saw his budget

Courtesy of United States Marine Band

Courtesy of United States Marine Band

The band has had many famous directors; however, the most unique pair was probably William H. Santelmann (left), 16th director of the band from 1898 to 1927, and his son, William F. Santelmann (above), 18th director of the band from 1940 to 1955.

and manning levels slashed. Looming large in the sights of Congressional budget cutters was the Marine Band. Louis Schneider, then the director, was ridiculed by the press with reviews that stated: "Put a musician in the place of Schneider." It caused McCawley to complain, "The Band gives me more trouble than all of the Corps put together."

The Commandant, as Burrows had before him, realized that he might win much needed appropriations if he could cultivate public support. To that end he issued new uniforms, improved drill and put Marine battalions from the barracks and shipyards on parade at all patriotic celebrations in Washington and other Eastern cities. Schneider and the band came under McCawley's fire, too. He convened a board of investigation and found the unfortunate Schneider to be "unfit for service."

Schneider's loss was the Corps'—and the nation's—gain for it opened the door to the greatest bandmaster of them all.

In some ways John Philip Sousa's appointment as bandmaster was an unintended result of the incident with the Italian musicians. In the years following the Italian band incident, the enlistment of apprentices for the Marine Band who were as young as 12 was considered good training. As those boys grew to manhood, they became well drilled, obedient and exemplary in their appearance. They were prime candidates for noncommissioned officers of the line. One of the beneficiaries was a young violinist who enlisted in 1867 named John Philip Sousa. His father had been a trombonist with the band and signed on the 13-year-old Sousa to play as a violinist and trombonist.

Sousa left the Corps at age 20 to pursue other musical endeavors. Six years later, while on tour in St. Louis, he received a telegram asking him to return. At age 26 he became the band's 17th leader. Sousa's philosophy was simple: "The Marine Band is virtually the National Band, and that band should be as great among bands as America is among nations," he said.

It was Sousa's first experience conducting a military band, and his approach musically and militarily became nothing short of sensational. He replaced much of the band's music library from orchestra arrangements to arrangements that better accommodated the concert band and changed the instruments to meet his needs. Rehearsals became exceptionally strict, and he drove his musicians all the while reminding them that they were going to be the nation's premier military band.

To help boost morale, Sousa obtained permission to hire the band out for private engagements, thus making its wages competitive with other Washington musicians. He broadened the repertoire by composing his own marches. In a masterful public relations coup, Sousa dedicated a march to *The Washington Post* newspaper, thereby ensuring publicity for the band and its concerts. He also added light operatic concert pieces from Europe as well as renditions of traditional American folk songs which everyone knew.

It was under Sousa's tenure that the famous "The Marines' Hymn" came into being. Legend has it that in 1847 a Marine stationed in Mexico, after America's war with that country, wrote the original words. However, the melody (although not exactly the same) can be found in the Jacques Offenbach's French operetta "Genevieve de Brabant" written in the late 1800s. The exact evolution of "The Marines' Hymn" is unclear, but Sousa, who years before had toured with Offenbach, was certainly indirectly

Concerts are its forte, and the band has played in the world's best concert halls such as its 1993 Boston performance where GySgt Cynthia Rugolo, on piccolo, and other members played "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

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involved in "The Marines' Hymn" as leathernecks know it today.

Sousa ordered bandsmen back on their feet and drilled them into a marching unit which improved their military performances and thus pleased Marine officers. He led the band for 12 years and wrote more than 100 marches, earning the title of the "March King." One composition, "Semper Fidelis," became the official Marine Corps march. Sousa later said, "It is played, I think, more than any other march ever written, by bands possessing a trumpet and drum corps.... I am very proud of the fact that it is the only composition which can claim official recognition by our government."

The statement was not entirely accurate, however. Perhaps, the most significant tribute to Sousa's influence on American musical culture is his "Stars and Stripes Forever" which was designated as the national march of the United States in 1887. A White House memorandum states the march has become "an integral part of the celebration of American life." Anyone witnessing an American Fourth of July celebration knows the stirrings of patriotism the march arouses when it is played and the ovation that invariably follows.

Sousa also started the nationwide tours which have helped make the band famous and as visible in towns such as Sioux City, Iowa, and Baton Rouge, La., as in Washington, D.C.

In 1890 the band made its first recordings on the still new invention called the phonograph. Columbia Phonograph Company released 60 cylinders—the precursor of the wax record—that fall, and in less than two years more than 200 cylinders had been released. At the time it made Sousa's marches the most popular pieces ever recorded.

Although Sousa left the band in 1892, his influence and legacy continues even today.

When he died in 1932, his body was returned from Pennsylvania to his native Washington to lie in state at the Band Hall, Marine Barracks. Four days later two companies of Marines, sailors and the Marine Band with honorary pallbearers from the Army, Navy and Marine Corps headed the funeral procession from Marine Barracks to the Congressional Cemetery.

In 1974 the historic band hall at Marine Barracks was rededicated as the "John Philip Sousa Band Hall." The bell from SS *John Philip Sousa*, a World War II liberty ship, resides there. In 1976 Sousa was enshrined in the Hall of Fame for Great Americans during a ceremony at the John F. Kennedy Center for the

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Making more than 400 annual commitments, such as this one (above) in Lakeland, Fla., the band also makes more than 200 appearances at formal functions at the White House.

Courtesy of the White House

Performing Arts. It is also the custom for the outgoing director of the Marine Band to pass Sousa's baton during change of command ceremonies.

From Sousa to the present the band has continued its primary mission of "providing music for the President of the United States." It did, however, begin to play in other climes and places outside the United States. The first time was in 1932 at the Central Canadian Exposition in Ottawa. In 1970 a 13-piece orchestra accompanied President Richard M. Nixon to Yugoslavia. Four years later, a five-piece string orchestra played during a dinner hosted by President Nixon in Moscow.

The band as a unit performed its first overseas concert in Rotterdam, Netherlands, in 1985. That was followed by concerts in Dublin, Ireland, in 1986; Oslo, Norway, in 1989; and performances in Moscow, Kiev, L'vov, Minsk and Leningrad in 1990, followed by a 1992 performance in London.

Now, in the summer of 1998, on the parade ground of Marine Barracks, the band, Drum & Bugle Corps, Silent Drill Platoon and other platoons of the barracks go through their flawless performances awing and pleasing crowds attending the Friday Evening Parade. It is only one of more than 400 annual band commitments with more than 200 of those at the White House.

Since making its White House debut in 1801, the United States Marine Band has served the office of the President in a nonpartisian fashion, making it in a very real sense "The President's Own."

*Author's note: The following were used as references in compiling this story and are recommended for further reading: "The History of the United States Marine Corps" by Allan R. Millett; *"The U.S. Marine Corps Story" by J. Robert Moskin; *"Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps from 1775-1962" by Col Robert Debs Heinl Jr., USMC; and *"The Home of the Commandants" published by the Marine Corps Association.*

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