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# The Recruiting and Training of Apprentice Musicians in the Australian Military in the 1950s

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**Abstract:** *In 1951 the Australian military introduced an apprentice musicians' course to their recently formed Military Apprenticeship Scheme. This decision was made to increase dwindling personnel numbers in Australian military bands. However, unlike other apprentices under the scheme, early apprentice musicians did not receive any formal trade qualifications upon completion of their course. This article explores the recruitment and training of apprentice musicians in Australia in the 1950s. It examines the Australian military's attempts to both compensate them for their lack of formal qualifications, and create a long term career structure within the military for graduates of the apprentice musicians' course.*

**Keywords:** *Apprentice, military bands, Australia, 20th century, military music, military history.*

After World War II, personnel numbers in the Australian military fell to levels not seen since the end of World War I. During the later war, a total of 990,900 Australians had served in the defence forces, but by 1950 numbers had fallen to just 34,237.<sup>1</sup> As the Cold War progressed and the threat of Communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia loomed, the Australian military hierarchy decided that recruitment levels needed to be increased across the defence forces. As a result, the Military Apprenticeship Scheme was implemented in the army in 1950, and the other forces soon followed, allowing boys between 14 and 18 to become fulltime members of the Australian military.<sup>2</sup> In 1951, in response to a shortage of military bandmen, an apprentice musicians' course was added

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Beaumont, *Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 244, 306.

<sup>2</sup> "Australian Army Apprentices Association," Australian Army Apprentices Association, accessed January 10, 2014, <http://www.austarmyapprentice.org/>.

to the syllabus.<sup>3</sup> This article uses archival evidence and interviews with former participants to explore the recruitment and training of apprentice musicians in the Australian military in the 1950s.

The experiences of Australian apprentice musicians are yet to be explored in an academic work and this article aims to begin to fill that lacuna. The formation of the apprentice musicians' course is an important point in Australian military band history as it marks a major change in recruiting policy, being the only point at which boys under the age of 17 were trained to act as fulltime military bandsmen.<sup>4</sup> The two year course was also the longest period of training ever provided to bandsmen in the Australian military and the only time that people with no musical experience were recruited as fulltime, professional military bandsmen.

This paper builds on studies of recruitment in Australian military bands, such as Roland Bannister's article examining the effects on the band service in relation to another major change in recruiting policy, the 1984 introduction of women into military bands.<sup>5</sup> The experiences of apprentice musicians in the 1950s impacted on future recruiting policies as it demonstrated the difficulty of training people with no prior experience. As shall be shown, the inclusion of a musicians' course in the Military Apprenticeship Scheme prompted the introduction of a formal career structure, with regular opportunities for advancement in both the army and air force (the navy had had such a system in place since the 1930s). As a result of these experiences, the army band service studied by Bannister in the 1980s and 1990s consisted of highly experienced, often university educated musicians with a clear career structure ahead of them.

As well as recruitment within military bands, this article also explores the musical training the boys received, thereby building on Roland Bannister and Damon Cartledge's work on musical education in the Australian military.<sup>6</sup> This study will demonstrate a number of the problems faced by the military in attempting to provide a solid musical education to musically inexperienced apprentices and it will show some of the early

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<sup>3</sup> Defence Division in Department of the Army, "Enlistment of Band Boys." 1949-1958. National Archives of Australia (Series MP 927/1, Control Symbol A251/7/269).

<sup>4</sup> Between 1911 and 1927 boys aged between 14½ and 16 serving on the training ship HMAS *Tingira* formed volunteer bands, however they were being trained for general naval service, not specifically as bandsmen. Robin Himbury, *The Evolution of the Royal Australian Navy Band: A Chromatic Chronicle* (Woolahra: Pacific Books, 2011), 29.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Bannister, "Gender, Change and Military Music in the Australian Anzac Tradition: A Critical Perspective," *Context* 14 (Summer 1997-1998): 5-14; Roland Bannister, "Soldier-Musicians in an Australian Army Band: Understanding the Lived Experience of Gender," *Yearbook of the International Council of Traditional Music* 28 (1996): 131-146.

<sup>6</sup> Roland Bannister and Damon Cartledge, "Music Education as Vocational Education: A Study of the Australian Defence School of Music," *ASME XI National Conference Proceedings: New Sounds for a New Century* (1997): 9-13; Roland Bannister and Damon Cartledge, "New Musicians in an Old Tradition: Music Education as Vocational Education at the Defence Force School of Music," *Research Studies in Music Education*, 21/1 (1999): 58-67.

solutions that were devised. Bannister and Cartledge describe the apprentice musicians' course as the forerunner of the Defence Force School of Music courses which they explore in their research.<sup>7</sup> In examining military music education in the 1950s, this article fills an important gap in the literature on Australian military music education, and in doing so, provides a more detailed picture of military music education in the second half of the twentieth century.

Apprentice musicians were introduced into the Australian Regular Army (ARA) and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) in 1951, with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) beginning its program in 1955.<sup>8</sup> Originally known as band boys in the ARA and boy musicians in the RAN, in 1954 the recruits were renamed apprentice musicians and junior musicians respectively.<sup>9</sup> To avoid confusion, the term apprentice musician will be used throughout this article. Although apprentice musicians and other members of the band service were primarily being trained to provide music, they were also active members of the military, and during their apprenticeship boys received ten hours a week of basic military training over and above their musical training.<sup>10</sup> As Bannister writes, "soldier-musicians are, in the eyes of their employers, indeed soldiers, soldiers whose specialty is music and ceremony."<sup>11</sup> Prior to the end of World War II, army bandsmen had been trained to serve as stretcher-bearers and RAN bandsmen, while on active service, worked in the transmitting station. However, by the 1950s, musicians' primary military role was ceremonial. Soldier-musicians recruited in the 1950s would have been particularly aware of the military side of their service. Both the navy and army band services had faced high casualty rates during World War II, and many bandsmen were taken as prisoners of war.<sup>12</sup> The RAN band service suffered the highest casualty rate of any RAN corps during the war.<sup>13</sup> Bands also served on ships during the Malayan Emergency (1950-1960) and the Korean War (1950-1953).<sup>14</sup> The primary role of musicians during these conflicts was musical and ceremonial duties, however, in the RAN when action stations were called they performed a range of tasks, such as loading and preparing ammunition. ARA musicians continued to work as stretcher-bearers in Korea but, in the Malayan

<sup>7</sup> Bannister and Cartledge, "Music Education as Vocational Education," 10.

<sup>8</sup> Himbury, *The Evolution of the Royal Australian Navy Band*, 58; Royal Australian Air Force, "Purchase of Band Instruments for RAAF Central Band" 1954. National Archives of Australia (Series A705, Control Symbol 22/2/91).

<sup>9</sup> Himbury, *The Evolution of the Royal Australian Navy Band*, 55; Defence Division in Department of the Army, *Enlistment of Band Boys*.

<sup>10</sup> Defence Division in Department of the Army, "Enlistment of Band Boys in the Australian Regular Army" 1950-1951. National Archives of Australia (Series MP897/1, Control Symbol 127/1/809).

<sup>11</sup> Bannister, "Soldier-Musicians in an Australian Army Band", 133.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Malcolm Uren, *A Thousand Men at War: The Story of the 2/16th Battalion, A.I.F.* (Loftus: Australian Military History Publications, 2009), 10-11; Lindsay C Cox, *Brave and True: The Band of the 2/22nd Battalion* (Melbourne: The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory Archives and Museum, 2003), 126-127; Himbury, *The Evolution of the Royal Australian Navy Band*, 46-47.

<sup>13</sup> John Trendall, *A Life on the Ocean Wave: The Royal Marines Band Story*, (Dover: Blue Band Magazine, 1990), 122.

<sup>14</sup> Ernest Trotter (retired military musician, ARA) in discussion with the author, September 2011.

Emergency, this was phased out and replaced with duties such as resupplying troops and manning the canteens.<sup>15</sup>

The Military Apprenticeship Scheme was not the first time boys under 16 had been trained for military duty in Australia. Between 1911 and 1936, the RAN, Australia's oldest fulltime military force, had trained 25 boys at a time, aged between 14½ and 16, for ratings positions (non-officer ranks) aboard HMAS *Tingira*.<sup>16</sup> The RAN also trained boys aged between 13 and 17 for officer positions at the Royal Australian Naval College from 1913 to 1934. However, this had been on a small scale, with between 12 and 30 boys in each year level.<sup>17</sup> Both of these groups of boys were trained for general naval service, not specifically as naval musicians, although some of the boys aboard HMAS *Tingira* did form volunteer amateur bands during their training.<sup>18</sup> While the RAN's training of boys under 17 had been on a small scale, the Military Apprenticeship Scheme was much broader. It included all three branches of the military (army, navy and air force) and trained boys in a range of trades. This was the first large scale training of boys under the age of 17 in the Australian military.

Boys joining the Military Apprenticeship Scheme did so on a fulltime basis, in lieu of further secondary schooling. Upon completion of their studies, staying in the military was not optional, with fulltime service being required for a further six years. As apprentices were being taught trade skills, they were not expected to become officers, but to take up ratings appointments. Apprentice musicians, in particular, were often recruited from orphanages and boys' homes, as shall be demonstrated later in the article. Prior to the introduction of musicians into the apprenticeship scheme, the ARA offered apprenticeships in eight trades:<sup>19</sup>

- Fitter
- Blacksmith
- Vehicle mechanic
- Electrician
- Telecommunications mechanic
- Carpenter and joiner
- Plumber and pipe fitter
- Bricklayer

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<sup>15</sup> Ross MacNamara (retired military musician, RAN) in discussion with the author, July 7, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Himbury, *The Evolution of the Royal Australian Navy Band*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> I. J. Cunningham, *Work Hard, Play Hard: The Royal Australian Naval College 1913-1988*, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988), 4, 8, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Himbury, *The Evolution of the Royal Australian Navy Band*, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Defence Division in Department of the Army, *Enlistment of Band Boys*.

Apprentices in the above fields completed five years of training and received nationally recognised qualifications. At the completion of their training they had a six year service obligation to fulfil and, at the end of that time, they were free to leave the military as fully qualified tradesmen. Apprentice musicians, on the other hand, received 18 months (later increased to two years) training but received no formal qualifications. As F.R. Sinclair, the Secretary to the Department of Treasury, Defence Division, stated:

Band-boys will be taught an art which for the great majority will have little or no remunerative value outside the Army. So far as is known there are no brass bands on full time duty except in the Services.<sup>20</sup>

Although Sinclair was referring to ARA bands with their brass band instrumentation, his statement remains true for the RAN and RAAF bands which used concert band instrumentation (wind, brass and percussion). Australia's only professional civilian concert band, the ABC Military Band, had disbanded in 1951.

The training the boys received in the 1950s resulted in no formal qualifications. It was highly vocational and highly specific to their role as soldier-musicians.<sup>21</sup> Unlike other military apprentices, the training delivered by the army band service, as it stood at the time, did not provide a viable long term career prospect outside of the military for most of the boys involved. At the end of their six year service obligation, they had few career options other than to stay in the military.

The Australian military introduced a number of measures in response to the difference in career prospects between musicians and other apprentices. While other military apprentices began their training at 14, apprentice musicians, whose course of training was shorter, did not enlist until the age of 15. In the 1950s, this was the age at which "the majority of young people" in Australia left school to seek employment.<sup>22</sup> This meant that if apprentice musicians later chose to leave the military, they would not be disadvantaged by having a lower educational standard than the majority of the population. Further, in acknowledging that their apprenticeships were not recognised outside the military, apprentice musicians received higher rates of pay than other apprentices.<sup>23</sup> Pay rates operated on a sliding scale, depending on a boy's age and which year of his apprenticeship he was in. An 18 year old apprentice musician in his final year received 16 shillings and two pence more per day than an apprentice of the same age in another trade.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> F.R. Sinclair, Secretary, Department of the Treasury in Defence Division in Department of the Army – Central Office, *Enlistment of Band Boys*.

<sup>21</sup> Roland Bannister and Damon Cartledge, "New Musicians in an Old Tradition," 58-67. For a more detailed discussion on the differences between military and civilian musical training in Australia, see Bannister and Cartledge's studies on vocational education at the Defence Force School of Music.

<sup>22</sup> Johanna Wyn, *Touching the Future: Building Skills for Life and Work*, (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2009), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Defence Division in Department of the Army, *Enlistment of Band Boys*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

This difference in pay rates caused friction between apprentice musicians and other military apprentices, resulting in apprentice musicians being “belittled and victimised...not because of their shortcomings as soldiers, but because they [were] Band Boys.”<sup>25</sup> An army memo dated, 24 March 1954, identifies jealousy over apprentice musicians’ wealth compared to other military apprentices as being one of the primary causes of this bullying, specifically, their ability to purchase items such as radiograms, radios and archery and spear fishing equipment.<sup>26</sup> This victimisation was identified by an unnamed member of the music staff, as one of the major causes of unrest among the 1954 army intake of band boys.<sup>27</sup> This intake was originally 30 boys but, by the end of the first year, eight had been discharged as illegal absentees and a further six had applied for transfer.<sup>28</sup>

In 1954, in an attempt to minimise the unrest between apprentice musicians and other apprentices, the pay rates of apprentice musicians were altered. While their overall pay was not changed, their take-home pay was reduced to the same as that of other apprentices. The difference was made up by free provision of clothing throughout their training, with any additional pay being deferred and paid in a lump sum at the completion of their course (or, for those who did not complete the course, upon discharge from the military).<sup>29</sup> At the same time, the ARA changed the name of the rank of band boy to apprentice musician on the grounds that it was “a more attractive and descriptive name than bandboy (*sic*), and conforms to the usage of the Apprentices School.”<sup>30</sup>

While a series of memos found in the Defence Division in the Department of the Army’s *Enlistment of Band Boys*, housed at the National Archives of Australia, demonstrates friction between apprentice musicians and other apprentices, my research has not uncovered any instances of resentment of apprentice musicians from older members of the band service.<sup>31</sup> This stands in marked contrast to Bannister’s findings concerning the introduction of women to the ranks in 1984. Even though women were eventually accepted by their male colleagues, Bannister identifies initial concern among some members of the service as they believed that women would undermine the smooth running of military bands.<sup>32</sup> The same was not true for apprentice musicians because, by the time they completed their training and joined the senior band service, they were men of the same age as other recruits.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Bannister, “Gender, Change and Military Music in the Australian Anzac Tradition”, 11-12.

For members of the ARA and RAAF bands, the introduction of apprentice musicians was part of a policy specifically aimed at improving the career prospects for all musicians serving in the armed forces. While staff at the apprenticeship school were concerned about the lack of career prospects for apprentice musicians *outside* of the military, there was also significant concern about long term career prospects for musicians *within* the military.<sup>33</sup> The problem was first identified by the RAN in the 1930s (the RAN was the only branch of the Australian military to have a fulltime band service prior to World War II), when they had difficulty attracting recruits for bands for their newly-purchased light-cruisers.<sup>34</sup> Two of the major problems discouraging the enlistment of new recruits was a lack of career structure for bandsmen and wages. Pay rates on enlistment were below award rates, with the average pay increase for RAN musicians in the 1930s being 11 pence over 12 years of service.<sup>35</sup> With provision for only one Bandmaster and two Band Corporals per ensemble, the majority of RAN musicians would never see promotion.<sup>36</sup> The RAN had solved this problem by 1939 with the introduction of trade tests. Trade tests were a series of exams based on a specific trade (in this case music), “with successful candidates receiving a pay rise, and incremental pay rises every three years for the first 12 years of service.”<sup>37</sup> The original RAN trade test for musicians included a minimum six months service, a musical exam (usually conducted by a unit’s Bandmaster) in which musicians were tested on two instruments (or one as soloist) and an exam on the use of fire control instruments.<sup>38</sup>

While the trade test system had provided the RAN with a career structure for musicians from the 1930s, the ARA and RAAF were still in the process of forming such a system when the first apprentice musicians were recruited (indeed, the RAAF’s professional band service was only formed in 1954, just a year before the recruitment of the first RAAF apprentice musicians). As such, for musicians in the ARA and RAAF, the introduction of apprentice musicians could be seen not as a threat but as part of a process aimed at ensuring a smooth career progression for military musicians from apprenticeship through to retirement. For example, in 1954, three years after the introduction of apprentice musicians, ranks for musicians in the ARA were:

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<sup>33</sup> Defence Division in Department of the Army, *Enlistment of Band Boys*.

<sup>34</sup> Although only the RAN had a full time professional band service, all three forces had amateur bands made up of members of the military who volunteered their time and musical skill; Anthea Skinner, “The Band Aboard HMAS *Sydney*,” *Re-Visions: Proceedings of the New Zealand Musicological Society and the Musicological Society of Australia Joint Conference hosted by the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand 2010* (2013): 154.

<sup>35</sup> Royal Australian Navy, “Review of Service Conditions 1939 – Band Ratings Pay and Allowances” 1921-1940. National Archives of Australia (Series MP150/1, Control Symbol 437/202/112)

<sup>36</sup> For further discussion of recruiting and pay changes to the 1930s RAN band service, see Skinner, “The Band aboard HMAS *Sydney*”.

<sup>37</sup> Skinner, “The Band aboard HMAS *Sydney*”, 157.

<sup>38</sup> Royal Australian Navy, “Review of Service Conditions 1939”.

- Apprentice musician
- Recruit musician
- 2-Star bandsman
- 3-Star bandsman (this rank was still being approved).
- Band non-commissioned officer (NCO)
- Band sergeant
- Bandmaster

Once recruited, apprentice musicians underwent an 18 month course to train them to become military musicians. This course was extended to two years after a number of boys, many of whom had no prior musical experience, failed to reach the required standard of musicianship at the completion of their course.<sup>39</sup>

Post-war Australian apprentice musician training, like much of Australia's military policy at the time, was based on the British military system. While the Australian apprentice musicians' course was in its infancy in the 1950s, the British army and navy had been recruiting apprentice musicians (known in the British system as band boys) since at least the nineteenth century.

While both the British and Australian systems recruited apprentice musicians without any kind of musical aptitude testing, the British system was more effective for a number of reasons. British band boys were recruited at 14, giving them an extra year of training over Australian boys. Further, they were not expected to work as military musicians throughout their entire career. Instead, training as a military musician was supposed to provide good grounding in the discipline of army life so that the boys could move to roles more central to the needs of the military as they grew. This meant that if they did not excel on their instruments, they could be transferred out of bands as soon as they entered the regular army or navy. The British army and navy also recruited many of its band boys from military boarding schools which specialised in band training. Two such schools were Newport Market Army Band School and *Arethusa* Training Ship. Research participant Archie Burt attended Newport Market Army Band School from the age of nine. When he turned 14, the minimum age of enlistment, he was driven by one of his teachers directly from the school to the local barracks to enlist.<sup>40</sup> Like the Australian apprentice musicians of the 1950s, Burt did not receive any musical aptitude testing prior to enlisting as a band boy. However, by the time he reached 15, the minimum age for Australian apprentice musicians, he had already received six years of training as a soldier-musician.

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<sup>39</sup> Defence Division in Department of the Army, *Enlistment of Band Boys*.

<sup>40</sup> Archie Burt (retired military musician, British Army, Royal Australian Air Force) in discussion with the author, February, 2012.

While British band boys were trained for general military life, Australian apprentice musicians were trained specifically to serve as musicians. The Australian Military Apprenticeship Scheme was already training boys as young as 14 for other aspects of military life and, consequently, apprentice musicians were simply not needed to fill the gaps. Despite this, many Australian apprentice musicians did not receive musical aptitude testing during recruitment, resulting in a number of the boys failing to make significant improvement. The low level of musical skill in newly recruited apprentice musicians is shown by the subjects covered in the first semester of the army's apprentice musicians' course (see figure 1). They covered such basic skills as forming an embouchure (correct lip position) and producing a note. By the end of the first semester (a quarter of the way through the two year course), the boys were only expected to be able to play "simple Hymn tunes, in combination as a band."<sup>41</sup>

<b>Practical</b>	<b>Theory</b>
1. Introduction to the instrument and elementary maintenance.	1. To learn all definitions, as in "Davenport's Elements of Music".
2. Formation of the embouchure.	2. The relative length of notes, and rests; elementary study of Time.
3. Production of a note.	3. The dotted note.
4. The function of the valves.	4. Study of Clefs and the Grand Stave.
5. The harmonic series, and the compass of the instrument.	5. Study simple intervals.
6. To learn, and play the natural scale and exercises in that key.	6. Learn the degrees of the scale.
7. To learn, and play the scale of G major and exercises in that key.	7. Learn all the key signatures.
8. To learn, and play the scale of F major and exercises in that key.	8. Recognition of all written intervals
9. To play simple Hymn Tunes in combination as a Band	9. Theoretical knowledge of all major scales.

**Figure 1:** Topics Taught in Semester 1, Army Band Boys' Course, 1954.<sup>42</sup>

Graduating apprentice musicians were required to serve in bands in the Australian military for a minimum of six years. However, the standard required to complete the course did not require them to play at a professional level. The required level of musical skill for army apprentice musicians graduating into the regular army was:

<sup>41</sup> Defence Division in Department of the Army, *Enlistment of Band Boys*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

- To be able to play major and minor scales, up to four flats and four sharps.
- To be able to play band parts at an average band standard.
- To have thorough knowledge of the instrument, both in its musical function, and for maintenance...
- To have good knowledge of the Rudiments of Music ...<sup>43</sup>

The low standard of musicianship in the first intake of apprentice musicians quickly resulted in the implementation of musical aptitude testing of potential new recruits. One particular recruit, Band Boy Henson, appeared so well suited to life as a military musician that he is mentioned in formal military recruiting letters.<sup>44</sup> As a result, his example directly influenced the Australian military's recruiting policy for apprentice musicians. Henson was a member of the 1952 intake of army band boys. It was noticed by his instructors that not only were his musical skills far in advance of the other boys, but his "bearing, ability and general demeanour" were ideal for a young soldier.<sup>45</sup>

Henson was so well suited to life as an army apprentice musician because he had grown up in a Salvation Army Boys' Home. Many boys' homes had strong brass band programs, and boys that had grown up in them were already accustomed to the bad food and strict discipline of institutional life.<sup>46</sup> Prior to the passage of the 1954 *Children's Welfare Act*, Australian orphanages had "no agreed minimum standards of food, clothing, living conditions, recreation, health or training."<sup>47</sup> As such, the conditions at institutions varied widely. Indeed, prior to the introduction of social workers in the 1960s, even the process of deciding who should be admitted into an Australian orphanage was made on an ad hoc basis. Decisions were often made "based on whether or not beds were available rather than [on] an assessment of the family's circumstances and options."<sup>48</sup> Not all of the children housed in orphanages were actually orphans, as the homes also included children whose families lived in poverty, child migrants, Aboriginal children, children with mild disabilities, children of single mothers and children displaying delinquent behaviour.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> F.R. Sinclair in Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Christine Kenneally, "The Forgotten Ones," *The Monthly*, August 2012, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Karen Twigg, *Shelter for the Children: A History of St Vincent De Paul Child and Family Service 1854-1997* (Melbourne: Sisters of Mercy, 2000), 80.

<sup>48</sup> Beth Robertson, "Orphaned in South Australia: Oral Histories about Growing up at Goodwood Orphanage," *Oral History of Australia Association Journal* 17 (1995): 88.

<sup>49</sup> Caroline Jones, "Adoption: A Study of Post-War Child Removal in New South Wales," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 86.1 (2000): 51-64. The experiences of Aboriginal children removed from their parents (known as the Stolen Generation) has been the subject of government enquiry, as have the broader experiences of children in care. Details of those enquiries can be found at <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-stolen-children-report-1997and>

Boys who had grown up in such institutions were already used to the “highly regulated institutional life” that the military had to offer.<sup>50</sup> A participant in Robertson’s study on orphanages in South Australia sums up the combination of dependence and independence which was fostered at such institutions, and which helped to make the children so suited to life in the military:

Part of me had this over-reliance on authority because they made decisions for us and life was so regimented we didn’t have to think for ourselves, and yet another part of me was very independent because the nuns encouraged us to look after ourselves. So there was that contradictory situation and it’s something that I’ve always lived with since – something I’m very conscious of.<sup>51</sup>

So while the British band boy system relied on recruits from specialist military schools, the Australian military discovered they did not need to train boy musicians under the age of 15 in this way. Orphanages and boys’ homes with brass band programs were already providing the necessary skills the military desired.

In 1952, a letter was sent from the ARA to the Chief Secretary of the Salvation Army, regarding sourcing recruits from its Boys’ Homes.<sup>52</sup> Included with the letter were recruiting pamphlets and application forms for the apprentice musicians’ course. The letter cited Band Boy Henson’s success in the program and went on to say:

It would be appreciated if you would bring these pamphlets to the notice of the officer in charge of your Boys Homes, in case they may know of boys who are willing to enlist and are suitable for training as Army musicians.<sup>53</sup>

In reality, many orphanage directors had been sending their young charges into the military since before the war. However, by directly targeting these boys, the Australian military now formalised the process.<sup>54</sup> In her study of post-war adoption practises, Caroline Jones found that residents of orphanages were “trained to fill unwanted jobs in domestic service, agriculture and industry” and, in this case, the military.<sup>55</sup>

Judging by the number of ex-residents of orphanages in the Australian military band service in the 1950s, the policy of recruiting directly from boys’ homes seems to have been successful. Ross MacNamara, was in the second intake of Band Boys in the RAN

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[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/Completed\\_inquiries/2004-07/inst\\_care/report/index](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/report/index).

<sup>50</sup> Robertson, “Orphaned in South Australia,” 91.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>52</sup> F.R. Sinclair, to Chief Secretary Salvation Army, 18 March 1952 in Defence Division in Department of the Army, *Enlistment of Band Boys*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> William Sheehan, “The Pre-War Orphans”, *Noteworthy News* (Australian Army Band Corps Association, November 3 1992).

<sup>55</sup> Jones, “Adoption”.

and commenced his apprenticeship in 1951. He remembers that he learnt of the course from friends who lived at the local Salvation Army Boys' Home.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, William Sheehan writes in his memoir that during his post-war service he "never served in a Regimental or Command Band that did not have at least two 'Old Boys.'"<sup>57</sup> The term 'Old Boys' was used by ex-residents of these orphanages to describe themselves.

Former RAN apprentice musician, Ross MacNamara, remembers his apprenticeship as an intensive training period with a steep musical learning curve. Apprentice musicians received only four hours of leave each week, which was taken on a Saturday afternoon. For the rest of the week they were:

All the time in the same place, so you'd be practicing all the time, and once you started to learn, and got a little bit of an interest in it, you'd set up little groups and play a little bit of Dixieland or something like that, which must have sounded pretty bad, but anyway. That's what you did. And when you were at sea it was the same thing.<sup>58</sup>

Musically speaking, MacNamara was a success story for the RAN's apprentice musicians' course. He entered the service with no prior musical experience and went on to become a solo clarinetist serving in a number of RAN bands and completing a tour of duty during the Malayan Emergency (1950-1960). However, he left the navy in 1959, shortly after his six year service obligation was completed and never worked as a professional musician again.

It was recognised from the outset by staff training apprentice musicians that boys serving with adult men were vulnerable to abuse.<sup>59</sup> Policies put in place to protect them began with an effort to separate them from other men on base so, consequently, separate barracks, ablution facilities and mess areas were provided for them. By 1952, they were completely removed from regular army bases, instead training at Balcombe Apprentices' Training Centre. Navy apprentice musicians, though, stayed on at the main base at HMAS *Cerberus*.<sup>60</sup>

In 2013 the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce was formed to investigate more than 2400 registered complaints.<sup>61</sup> The instances of abuse highlighted by the taskforce demonstrates the vulnerable position those young men were in.<sup>62</sup> The previously

<sup>56</sup> Ross MacNamara (retired military musician, RAN) in discussion with the author July 5, 2012.

<sup>57</sup> William Sheehan, "The Pre-War Orphans".

<sup>58</sup> Ross MacNamara in discussion with the author, July 5, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Defence Division in Department of the Army, *Enlistment of Band Boys*.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid; Himbury, *The Evolution of the Royal Australian Navy Band*, 55.

<sup>61</sup> "Defence Abuse Response Taskforce refers first cases of alleged sexual abuse to police," *ABC News Online*. Last modified August 13, 2013. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-08-13/first-cases-in-army-sex-abuse-investigation-referred-to-police/4883120>

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, "Smith Flags Royal Commission into Defence Sex Abuse," Last Modified June 15, 2012. *ABC News Online*, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-06-15/smith-flags-possible-royal-commission-into-defence-sex-claims/4072000>.

mentioned bullying and harassment of apprentice musicians by other apprentices at the Army Apprentice School is discussed in the taskforce's *Report on Abuse in Defence*. The report goes on to state that "[a]lmost half the complainants who reported abuse at the Army Apprentice School experienced sexual abuse (29 complainants)" but it does not mention whether the 29 complainants included any apprentice musicians.<sup>63</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The apprentice musicians' course marks a unique point in Australian military band history. In an attempt to boost flagging post-war recruitment numbers boys with little, if any, musical experience enlisted to be trained as fulltime professional musicians. Although it was based on the British band boy system, Australia, unlike Britain, did not have pre-existing military colleges to supply the military with pre-trained recruits. After a number of inexperienced apprentice musicians failed to complete the course, orphanages featuring brass band programs were directly targeted for recruiting campaigns to remedy this situation. This recognition of the difficulty of training musicians from scratch marked a turning point in the recruitment of musicians in the Australian military, with professional standards slowly increasing over time. As a result, by the 1980s and 1990s, musicians were recruited with extensive musical experience, as shown by Bannister and Cartledge's research.<sup>64</sup>

The need to provide apprentice musicians with a viable career structure also resulted in long term changes to the working lives of military musicians. While apprentices in other trades were able to leave the military with nationally recognised qualifications, the apprentice musicians' course did not provide similar long term security. As a result, the ARA and RAAF implemented a program of trade tests to ensure a viable career path for musicians. Based on the system the RAN had been using since the 1930s, trade tests allowed for regular assessment and promotion of musicians. This encouraged both the recruitment and retention of musicians.

The apprentice musicians' course in the 1950s was the beginning of a process of modernisation and professionalisation of the Australian military's band service. For the army and the air force it marked the beginning of a fulltime, professional band service. Recruiting boys with little musical experience for military service forced their instructors and commanding officers to closely examine both the educational requirements and the long term career prospects for military musicians. The decisions that they made created the groundwork for the formation of the highly educated, fulltime professional band service in the Australian military today.

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<sup>63</sup> Defence Abuse Response Taskforce, *Report on Abuse in Defence* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2014) 206.

<sup>64</sup> Bannister and Cartledge, "Music Education as Vocational Education", 11.

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