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# U.S. Mounted Bands and Cavalry Field Musicians in the Union Army during the Civil War— Background, Duties, and Training

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## Introduction

Military music is a key component in the global history of instrumental music, and while hundreds of military bands still exist throughout the world, the last century has seen the wind band tradition shift from its military origins to an increase of community bands in Europe, as well as school, college, and university bands in North America. Modern concert and marching bands are direct descendents of military bands in terms of instruments, instrument development, repertoire, and pageantry. Part of this convention rests within the mounted tradition when trumpet and drum signals were crucial for cavalries within European armies—especially after the advent of gunpowder, when something louder than the human voice was needed for communication on the battlefield. These signalers, as well as the Saracen model of horse- and camel-mounted musicians playing *hautbois* (shawm-like instruments—predecessors of today's oboe), kettledrums, trumpets, and other horns in processions, ceremonies, and battle movements, served as the basis for mounted bands in Europe.

While the mounted band tradition had been introduced to Europe through the Crusades—probably by the French—the practice caught on initially in the areas of Hungary and Austria, where it was reinforced through repeated connections in war with the Ottoman Turks.<sup>1</sup> Mounted bands of trumpeters and kettledrummers had become common in the trains of artillery and cavalry in Europe when moving to and from battle, with musicians gathering from individual units at the heads of trains to serve as an impetus on the march, as well as to provide a noble presence at and away from court.

Capitalizing on this centuries-old custom, which had originally been reserved for nobility, the U.S. Cavalry employed horse-mounted bands for roughly a century, at least from the 1840s until World War II. The purpose of the present study is to chronicle the function and training of U.S. horse-mounted field musicians and bands through the time of the Civil War, with the intent of illustrating one aspect of the predecessors of present-day school bands.

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1. For a detailed synopsis of mounted band history see Bruce P. Gleason, "Horse-Mounted Military Musicians: An Overview," *Journal of Band Research* 39, no. 1 (2003): 1–34.

American music education in the 1860s was a far cry from that of the following century. It was not yet thirty years past the time of Lowell Mason's work in Boston. Luther Whiting Mason served in the Civil War and had not yet made a name for himself with the *National Music Course*, and the school band and orchestra movements were still several decades away. Professional and amateur music-making, however, was abundant in many areas across the country, with vocal and instrumental instruction being provided by private teachers, singing schools, and on-the-job training. Professional orchestras like the Philharmonic Society of New York had been in existence since 1842; the Boston Handel and Haydn Society was a half-century old, and town bands were thriving even in rural areas across the country. Within this context, the period of the Civil War propelled bands further into the popular mainstream with bands playing at recruitment rallies and troop farewells, and within most of the major campaigns.

While several individuals, including Custer himself, mentioned mounted bands and field musicians in memoirs and other chronicles, it is the intent of this study to add to the body of knowledge of band history and document the rich heritage of contemporary band music education and performance practices by gathering these accounts, letters, and narratives into a single record.

### U.S. Military Music Background

While a detailed history of military bands is outside the parameters of this study, a brief review of bands leading up to those of the Civil War warrants mention, as does making a distinction between field musicians and band musicians, who had different duties and were regarded separately.

#### U.S. Military Band History

As direct descendents with strong British and Continental ties, military bands in the American colonies stemmed from their European roots in instrumentation. Early colonial bands were based on the *hautbois*, as indicated in a *Boston News-Letter* article of October 11, 1714, which reported on the New York celebrations of the coronation of King George I:

New York, October 11. . . . The Regular Forces Marching after his Excellency, and the Corporation, with Hoboys [*hautbois*] and Trumpets before them. The Militia making a double Guard for Him from the Fort to the City Hall, all the Guns of the Garrison made a Triple Discharge, the Regular Forces and Militia Twice Three Volleys, with Huzza's and great Acclamations of Joy.<sup>2</sup>

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2. *New England: The Boston News-Letter, Published by Authority*, Number 548, from Monday, October 11, to Monday, October 18, 1714.

A later military band in the colonies was attached to Benjamin Franklin's Regiment and Artillery Company of Philadelphia in 1756. This ensemble would have numbered between four and eight musicians, and was probably based on the *harmoniemusik* idea, which consisted of some kind of combination of pairs of *hautbois* (and/or clarinets), horns, and bassoons.<sup>3</sup> This combination of instruments serves as the basis of military bands (as well as the orchestral woodwind section) to the present day. Although it was not a particularly loud combination, it was well balanced and the instruments were not restricted in melodic capability (as were the valveless brass instruments of the day).

Woodwinds, however, soon bowed to brass instruments in the makeup of U.S. military bands with the introduction of the keyed bugle around 1815. With keys similar in structure and purpose to those of a saxophone, the keyed bugle (also called the Royal Kent, or just Kent Bugle)<sup>4</sup> was the first brass instrument that could satisfactorily produce diatonic and chromatic pitches. This was a major breakthrough in military music because, as a brass instrument, the Kent Bugle could also play louder than woodwind instruments—setting the stage for the brass invasion of military music. The invention of the keyed bugle soon inspired the development of other keyed brass instrument families, the most well known of which was the “ophicleide,” developed by the Parisian instrument maker Jean-Hilaire Aste (also known as Halary or Halari), in 1817 and patented in 1821.<sup>5</sup>

Because of its brass basis, akin to the trumpets and bugles of the field music of the time, this combination spread throughout the U.S. military, although the valve soon overtook keys on brass instruments and rendered ophicleides obsolete.<sup>6</sup> Rotary- and piston-valved instruments became the norm in U.S. military bands, as the cornet (created around 1825 when French instrument makers added piston valves to the post horn) and saxhorns, a family of piston-valved conical brass instruments, named for their Franco-Belgian inventor, Adolphe Sax (who also developed his single-reed family of saxophones) overtook the families of ophicleides and other keyed brass instruments. Because of their sufficient carrying power that could be heard out of doors, their mellow sounds that blended well together, and their simple, relatively trouble-free mechanics,

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3. Raoul Camus, *Military Music of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 29, 43.

4. Invented in 1810 by Joseph Halliday, bandmaster of the Cavan Militia, the keyed bugle was also called the Royal Kent Bugle in honor of the Duke of Kent, commander-in-chief of the British Army.

5. Derived from two Greek words—*ophis* (serpent) and *kleis* (a key, cover, or stopper), ophicleide literally means keyed serpent, based on the earlier bass instrument, the serpent.

6. Heinrich Stölzel and Friedrich Blühmel, two Berlin musicians, are generally viewed as the inventors of the first successful valve on brass instruments, patenting their design in 1818.

cornets and saxhorns became the norm for U.S. infantry and cavalry bands, both of which soon included trombones.

Cavalry band instrumentation developed further when natural instruments began to be supplanted in the 1830s and 1840s under Wilhelm Wieprecht's Prussian military band reformation. Beginning with the Prussian cavalry, valved cornets, trumpets, tenor horns, tenor basses (an early baritone/euphonium), bass trombones, and later on, the new Moritz tuba (as well as the helicon), joined the British keyed bugle (and later the flügel horn) to form the basis of nineteenth-century cavalry bands, as well as the beginning of brass bands in general.<sup>7</sup> This was a major turning point for mounted musicians, as well as all military bands, because a larger repertoire of music was now available for instruments with complete scales and tuning flexibility.

**Figure 1.**



“Reception of General Michael Corcoran, by the Mayor and Citizens of New York City, August 22D, 1862, On his release from the Confederate Prison, in which he had been confined one year.” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*<sup>8</sup>

7. *Flügel* is German for wing or flank. While some sources indicate that the flügelhorn—a valved development of the keyed bugle—received its name because it was used to summon flanks during battle, it is more probable that the name came about because German cavalry bands rode in a V shape with two flügelhorns on each “wing.”

8. Reception for Brigade-General Corcoran hosted by Mayor Opdyke and the citizens of New York at Castle Garden—from an article, “The Soldier in Our Civil War,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, 6 September 1862, 374–375. Author’s collection.

Within this movement, valved instruments developed in four different styles—bell front, upright, over the shoulder (patented by Allen Dodworth in 1838; see Figure 1 on previous page), and wrap-around (in the style of helicons, the predecessor of the sousaphone). Wrap-around instruments were popular with cavalry bands because they were easier to hold and play with one hand (while the other hand held the horse's reins). Over-the-shoulder saxhorns were used to direct the sound back toward the troops marching or riding behind the band. These styles of brass instruments spread through the U.S. and were widely used by the time of the Civil War, although instrumentation varied from band to band. In their pictorial history, Robert Garofalo and Mark Elrod offer the following instrumentation for brass bands of that era:

First and Second E<sup>b</sup> cornet (or saxhorn),  
 First and Second B<sup>b</sup> cornet (or saxhorn),  
 First and Second E<sup>b</sup> alto horn,  
 First and Second B<sup>b</sup> tenor horn,  
 B<sup>b</sup> baritone,  
 E<sup>b</sup> bass, side drum, bass drum and cymbals.<sup>9</sup>

Other variations of the time are listed in Dodworth's *Brass Band School* and Friederich's *Brass Band Journal*.<sup>10</sup>

Dodworth

E<sup>b</sup> Soprano (first)  
 E<sup>b</sup> Soprano (second)  
 B<sup>b</sup> Alto (first)  
 B<sup>b</sup> Alto (second)  
 E<sup>b</sup> Tenor (first)  
 E<sup>b</sup> Tenor (second)  
 Baritone  
 Bass (first)  
 Bass (second)  
 E<sup>b</sup> Trumpet  
 Trombone (first)  
 Trombone (second)  
 Snare Drum  
 Bass Drum

Friederich

E<sup>b</sup> Soprano (first)  
 E<sup>b</sup> Soprano (second)  
 B<sup>b</sup> Alto (first)  
 B<sup>b</sup> Alto (second)  
 E<sup>b</sup> Tenor (first)  
 E<sup>b</sup> Tenor (second)  
 Baritone  
 Basso (first)  
 Basso (second)  
 E<sup>b</sup> Trumpet  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 Small Drum  
 Bass Drum

9. Robert Garofalo and Mark Elrod, *A Pictorial History of Civil War Era Musical Instruments and Military Bands* (Charleston, West Virginia: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1985), 56.

10. Allen Dodworth, *Brass Band School* (New York: H. B. Dodworth & Co., 1853); G.W.E. Friederich, *The Brass Band Journal* (New York: Firth, Pond, and Co., 1853).

The few mounted bands that existed in cavalry units in the Civil War would have had some kind of instrumentation like one of these. Garofalo and Elrod further indicate:

To this well-balanced instrumentation, some music [of the time] adds parts for solo alto horn, B-flat bass, and, occasionally, one or more of the following woodwind instruments: D-flat piccolo, C flute, E-flat soprano clarinet, and B-flat soprano clarinet. Although there were excellent Union bands that had a mixture of woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments, large bands with woodwind sections were exceptions to the rule of the day, which was the small 14- to 16-piece brass band.<sup>11</sup>

### U.S. Field Musicians

Signaling musicians (field music) and band musicians were typically separate entities and remained so until the practice of using musicians as signalers ceased with the advent of telephone and radio communication. While European tradition had elevated field trumpeting to a high skill and art that required years of apprenticeship training,<sup>12</sup> U.S. Civil War buglers often had no musical experience before enlisting, as in the case of George Sargent, an eighteen-year-old from Charlestown, Massachusetts. Sargent was a mounted bugler, and eventually a mounted cymbal player, with the First New England Cavalry, and later the First Rhode Island Cavalry and First New Hampshire Cavalry.<sup>13</sup> Enlisting initially on November 30, 1861, Sargent states in his diary entry for Monday, December 2, 1861:

In the afternoon we got our bugles and went down to a pond about half a mile distant to practice. I have heard it remarked that music hath charms to split a rock, but I think the music that afternoon was enough to split a whole stone quarry. It was the first time I ever undertook to blow a wind

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11. Garofalo and Elrod, *Pictorial History*, 56.

12. Gleason, "Horse-Mounted Military Musicians," 16–18.

13. The First New England Cavalry was formed 22 January 1861 with battalions from Rhode Island and New Hampshire. On 31 March 1862, the name of the regiment was changed from the First New England Cavalry to the First Rhode Island Cavalry by order of the War Department. In January 1864, the New Hampshire battalion separated from the First Rhode Island Cavalry, and became the nucleus of the new First New Hampshire Cavalry. The New Hampshire regiment fought with General Philip Sheridan's forces as part of the Army of the Shenandoah, and for a time served as Sheridan's escort and bodyguard, with the First New Hampshire Cavalry Band serving as Sheridan's headquarters' band. By January 1865, George Custer was the commander of the 3rd Cavalry Division of the Army of the Shenandoah, of which the First New Hampshire Regiment was a part. Sheridan commanded the Army of the Shenandoah from 6 August to 16 October 1864, and from 19 October 1864 to 28 February 1865.

instrument, but before night I felt competent to act as clerk to a fish peddler, that is I could do the blowing part.<sup>14</sup>

And further, according to the U.S. Army Bands Web site:

In addition to the bands of the Regular Army and the volunteer militias, there were field musicians. Field musicians, comprising of [*sic*] drummers and buglers, sounded camp calls and battlefield signals. They were not part of the band, and few could read music. Field musicians learned by rote the calls sounded at specific times in camp or upon command in battle.<sup>15</sup>

The distinction between field musicians and band musicians became more apparent on July 22, 1861, with the passage of “An Act to Authorize the Employment of Volunteers to aid in Enforcing Laws and Protecting Public Property.” Section 2 of the act deals with musical matters, and among other issues, authorized two principal musicians (trumpeters) per cavalry troop and sixteen musicians per cavalry band. Those authorizations seem to have stayed in place at least until the 1890s, although Sargent maintains that sometime in the fall of 1862, “the order was issued from the War Department allowing but one chief bugler to a regiment. Two was the number until then.”<sup>16</sup> The record isn’t apparent as to how long this order was in effect, or if in fact it was carried out. By the time of the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876, Custer’s Seventh Cavalry had two trumpeters per company.<sup>17</sup>

Trumpeters/buglers were required to know a variety of alarm, service, drill and field, and miscellaneous calls—most of whose origins have been lost in history—to be used in maneuvers, on the battlefield, in camp, or on parade. These field musicians sounded calls throughout the day, with some of the more common calls within cavalry units being “Boots and Saddles,” “To Horse,” “Forward,” “Charge,” “Taps,” “Tattoo,” “Reveille,” and “To the Standard.”<sup>18</sup>

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14. George Sargent, *Diary of a Bugler with Company C of the 1st Rhode Island Cavalry and Musician in the Regimental Band from His Enlistment in November 1861 to the Final Confederate Surrender in April 1865*, accessed from the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California. Sargent’s diary gives an interesting glimpse of military music life, as well as general wartime training, mobilization, rations, accommodations, boredom, entertainment, and of course, death.

15. “U.S. Army Bands in History, the Civil War,” *U.S. Army Bands*, Internet: <http://bands.army.mil/history/thecivilwar.asp>, accessed 5 January 2004.

16. *Ibid.*, accessed 17 January 2004; and Sargent, *Diary*, 14 December 1862.

17. Kenneth Hammer, *Biographies of the 7th Cavalry, June 25th 1876* (Fort Collins, Colorado: The Old Army Press, 1972), 44, 74.

18. Cavalry units carry *standards*, whereas infantry and artillery units carry *flags*. Standards are typically smaller than flags; both are referred to as “colors.”

Along with the distinction between field music and bands, there was also a difference between bugles and trumpets. Although the two instruments served in similar capacities, and later on, in the same functions, they are different instruments. A natural trumpet (valveless) has two thirds of its length in the form of a cylindrical tube, whereas a bugle has a conical shape throughout, and has its basis in the hunting horn—not in the military trumpet. As well, differences in mouthpieces—cup-shaped for the trumpet and funnel-shaped for the bugle—result in the trumpet having a bright, strident, brash sound, while the bugle is known for its darker and mellower tone. Confusion between the two instruments arises because the terms have been used interchangeably for decades. The natural trumpet used with kettledrums in court and military music was typically pitched in D (although sometimes was lowered to C with a crook) until the last half of the eighteenth century (when cavalry units moved to trumpets in E-flat), and was pitched a sixth below the present-day B-flat trumpet, rather than a third above. E-flat has traditionally remained the key of cavalry trumpets, and consequently cavalry bands.<sup>19</sup> Bugles however have traditionally been pitched in G. By the end of the nineteenth century, the field trumpet was more similar to the bugle than to the historic field trumpet, although Army regulations referred to both instruments, depending on the year of the regulation manuals.<sup>20</sup>

Of the bugle's introduction into the U.S. Cavalry, Raoul Camus states in *Military Music of the American Revolution*: "Seeing the success of the light infantry with the bugle horn, the dragoons [mounted infantrymen armed with carbines] adopted this instrument for use with detached parties. The same musician was expected to sound the trumpet when signaling the whole troop and the bugle horn when signaling small detachments."<sup>21</sup>

All of this is not to say that bugles were not used as musical instruments. Years after her husband's death, General George Custer's wife Elizabeth wrote of the post-war years: "In large posts, like Fort Leavenworth or Fort Lincoln,

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19. Titcomb, "Baroque Court and Military Trumpets and Kettledrums: Technique and Music," *The Galpin Society Journal* IX (June 1956): 66, 75, citing Mersenne, 1636; and Titcomb, "Carrousel Music at the Court of Louis XIV," in *Essays on Music in Honor of Archibald Thompson Davison by His Associates* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Department of Music, Harvard University, 1957), 210. At the time of this writing, several contemporary mounted musical units continue to play valveless instruments in E-flat, including the Danish *Gardehusarregimentets Hesteskadron Trompeterkorps* and the French *La Fanfare de Cavalerie de la Garde Républicaine*.

20. Cavalry Drill Regulations, 1896, 393; War Department: Office of the Chief of Staff, *Cavalry Drill Regulations*, United States Army, Document No. 561 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916) 393; War Department, *Technical Manual No. 20–250, Field Music*, Washington, DC, 1940, 1.

21. Raoul Camus, *Military Music*, 73.

there was a corps of trained buglers, and it was a surprise to strangers that such good music could be evolved from instruments with so few notes.”<sup>22</sup> Mounted bugle bands existed as well, stemming from the European custom of mounted bands of valveless trumpets. Walt Whitman mentions one of these ensembles in his June 29, 1863, war memoranda entry (Washington, D.C.), in which he also describes the aura that seems to regularly accompany such units:

Just before sundown this evening a very large cavalry force went by—a fine sight. The men evidently had seen service. First came a mounted band of sixteen bugles, drums and cymbals, playing wild martial tunes—made my heart jump. Then the principal officers, then company after company, with their officers at their heads, making of course the main part of the cavalcade; then a long train of men with led horses [pack horses], lots of mounted negroes with special horses—and a long string of baggage-wagons, each drawn by four horses—and then a motley rear guard. It was a pronouncedly warlike and gay show; the sabres clank'd, the men look'd young and healthy and strong; the electric tramping of so many horses on the hard road, and the gallant bearing, fine seat, and bright faced appearance of a thousand and more handsome young American men, were so good to see.<sup>23</sup>

### U.S. Mounted Bands

One of the earliest mentions of a mounted band in the United States is a quote of Henry Libenau in a record dated July 23, 1847, in Hackensack, New Jersey, in which he thanks “Capt. Jagels and his Troop of Hussars, together with his mounted band,” and other groups and individuals for participating in the “Funeral Obsequies” of a friend who had been killed in the Mexican War. Because it is not clear who recorded the funeral proceedings or what knowledge the writer had of cavalry units, or if Jagels’s troop members were really hussars, it is difficult to estimate what the instrumentation of a mounted band at this time in U.S. history would have been. However, the group probably consisted of a drummer of some sort, with a few trumpets, another brass instrument or two, and maybe a couple of *hautbois*.<sup>24</sup>

22. Elizabeth B. Custer, *Following the Guidon* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1890), vi.

23. Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), 728.

24. *Honor to the Brave, An Account of the Funeral Obsequies of the late Captain J. W. Zabriskie, of the 1st Illinois Regiment, who was slain at the battle of Buena Vista, on the 23d day of February, 1847* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Published by the Committee, 1847), copy in possession of author. Mounted bands of Hussar units (light cavalry units primarily used for scouting) in Europe were typically composed of one drummer with a pair of kettledrums, accompanied by several mounted trumpeters. Conversely, dragoon units (mounted infantrymen armed with carbines), typically employed mounted side drummers and *hautbois*.

## Mounted Cavalry Bands of the Union Army

With no courts of nobility or royalty as bases, the U.S. mounted band tradition relied on larger-than-life military personalities for its growth during the Civil War. Among these bands were those within units under the command of General Philip H. Sheridan, whose members found themselves reliving a Saracen custom of playing under fire by leading troops into battle while controlling their horses with their knees (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.**



Music on Sheridan's Line of Battle<sup>25</sup>

General Horace Porter wrote in 1897 of his experience serving as a courier for General Grant to General Sheridan, when Sheridan was commanding Union troops at the battle of Dinwiddie Courthouse:

I turned the corner of the Brooks cross-road and the Five Forks road just as the rear of the latter body of cavalry was passing it, and found one of Sheridan's bands with his rear-guard playing "Nellie Bly" as cheerfully as if furnishing music for a country picnic. Sheridan always made an effective use of his bands. They were usually mounted on gray horses, and instead of being relegated to the usual duty of carrying off the wounded and assisting the surgeons, they were brought out to the front and made to play the liveliest airs in their repertory, which produced excellent results in buoying up the spirits of the men. After having several of their instruments pierced by bullets, however, and the drums crushed by shells, as often happened, it must be admitted that the music, viewed purely in the light of an artistic performance, was open to adverse criticism.<sup>26</sup>

25. Robert Johnson and Clarence Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 1887 (Reprint, New York: Castle Books, Thomas Yoseloff, 1956), vol. 4, 708.

26. Horace Porter, *Campaigning With Grant*, ed. Wayne C. Temple (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961, reprint of 1897 edition), 431. This campaign was against Confederate forces led by Major General George A. Pickett, southwest of Petersburg, Virginia, on 31 March 1865, during the Appomattox Campaign—a day before the Battle of Five Forks.

Performances under fire apparently were not uncommon in Sheridan's command. An order given by the general to mass his musicians on the firing line, recorded in another account of the Battle of Dinwiddie Courthouse, serves as a vivid reminder of the tenuous circumstances that military musicians could find themselves in: "[Have the musicians] play the gayest tunes in their books—play them loud and keep on playing them, and never mind if a bullet goes through a trombone, or even a trombonist, now and then."<sup>27</sup>

Taking his cue from Sheridan (under whom he had served) on October 9, 1863, Brigadier General George Custer ordered the mounted band of the Michigan Cavalry Brigade to lead the unit into battle playing "Yankee Doodle" near James City, Virginia, against a contingency of Confederate cavalry led by Major General Fitzhugh Lee. Similarly at Columbia Furnace, Virginia, on April 16, 1862, Custer's band led the cavalry charge.<sup>28</sup> Another utilization of bands under Custer's watch is revealed in one of his reports during the Virginia Campaign: "I have caused fires to be built along the edge of the woods and my band to play at different points since dark, to give the impression that a strong force of infantry is here."<sup>29</sup>

Cavalry bandsmen themselves recalled varied battlefield experiences as the war went on. George Sargent, who was stationed with the First New England Cavalry at Manassas Junction near Bull Run stream—noted in his diary entry of July 20, 1862, that he joined the band (from being a field bugler) as a cymbal player:

I was well pleased with the change for several reasons: I was very fond of music, besides my duty would be lighter; and in the case of a fight I would not be in so much danger. All we had to do besides taking care of our horses was to play at Guard Mounting in the morning, dress parade in the afternoon, and before the Colonel's quarters in the evening.<sup>30</sup>

Two years later, Sargent was serving under Sheridan as part of the Army of the Shenandoah in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign. His diary entry for August 25, 1864, suggests that by this point he may have had a change of thought:

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27. Bruce Catton, *A Stillness at Appomattox* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1954), 347.

28. Don Harvey, "The Michigan Cavalry Brigade," *Michigan in the Civil War*, Internet: <http://hometown.aol.com/dlharvey/michbrig.htm>, accessed 15 February 2003; and Kenneth Olson, *Music and Musket, Bands and Bandsmen of the American Civil War* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), 207.

29. George A. Custer, Report No. 4, Mine Run, Virginia, 26 November 1863, in *Custer in the Civil War, His Unfinished Memoirs*, compiled and edited by John M. Carroll (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1977), 15.

30. Sargent, *Diary*, 20 July 1862.

The whole corps went out on a reconnaissance in force towards Martinsburg [West Virginia], but before reaching there we drove in the Reb pickets, and soon came to the main force, where skirmishers were sent out and a line of battle formed. . . . Presently, the Rebs made a charge, smoke and dust. I saw men and horses fall, officers shouting for the men to keep cool and steady, and presently one of our batteries opened from a small hill but a stone's throw behind us, throwing the shells over our heads; we fell back and took a position behind the battery and struck up "Star Spangled Banner," while the battery boys were dealing death and destruction among the Reb's ranks. . . . Although the balls whizzed over our heads and under our horses, none of our crowd got hurt, but some from another regiment got killed in a barnyard next to us. . . . This was the first time the band ever played on the battlefield and I don't care about repeating it very often. Although I liked the excitement, I didn't like the music of those lead pills that were flying about so carelessly.<sup>31</sup>

### Band Duty: Mounted and Dismounted

While cavalry bands in some cases led the way into battle, and performed in forward positions during fighting—with the martial and patriotic music startling the enemy and rallying soldiers to victory—the accounts of musicians performing in the midst of combat probably reflect unusual incidents. Musical duty for most mounted musicians typically consisted of performing under the less-threatening circumstances of military and civilian parades, drills, reviews, guard mounts, and other ceremonies for encamped troops and troop movements. Like infantry bands, cavalry bands also drummed soldiers out of the army and performed for funerals and executions. Another important aspect of Civil War military bands was to perform for the war weary in back areas—including military hospitals—to lift the morale of suffering soldiers, as Sargent recalls in this 1863 diary entry:

Went and played for the wounded soldiers again. One of the doctors told us that when we played there before, some of the men left their beds for the first time since the battle and have not taken to them since. He said it done them more good than all the medicine he could give them. So you see we are doing something for our beloved country.<sup>32</sup>

Since bands were considered essential for troop morale, musicians also performed (dismounted) at balls, other dances, and parties; for church calls and services; at formal and informal concerts in concert halls and forts; as well as in battlefield and expedition camps. As one of the popular music venues of the day before

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31. Sargent, *Diary*, 25 August 1864.

32. Sargent, *Diary*, 20 May 1863.

the dawning of professional bands, military bands performed the day's "hits" including: "Sweet Home," "Yankee Doodle," "Johnnie Stole the Ham," "Aren't You Glad to Get Out of the Wilderness," "Dixie," and the "Star Spangled Banner." In this vein, Sargent indicates that the band of the First New England Cavalry, in addition to brass instruments, had "...a full set of quadrille instruments, consisting of a harp, violins, clarinets, piccolo, guitar, and bass viol,"<sup>33</sup> which were used in camp: "Most every evening, we would have music, and sometimes dancing ... [even though]... the only thing we lacked was partners of the female persuasion."<sup>34</sup>

The work of a Civil War cavalry bandsman in the field varied. Like the rest of the army, band members often lived off the land but sometimes were able to find enjoyment even amidst hardship, as Sargent recalls in this 1862 entry:

Arrived at Rappahannock town this afternoon. ... As soon as camp was established, five of the band went out foraging for the whole band, bringing in corn and hay for the horses and turkeys and chickens for ourselves. Coming back, I had a race with the fastest horse in the regiment.<sup>35</sup>

His diary entries of January 5 and 13, 1865, when he was serving in the First New Hampshire Cavalry in the Third Cavalry Division under George Custer, which was part of Sheridan's Army of the Shenandoah, indicate that the soldier-musicians often had to focus on basic survival:

We cleared a space of the snow and pitched our shelter tent, which we lived in for the next three or four days, being nearly frozen during that time. We came to the conclusion we would stand it no longer, so George and I started off on a tour of observation after building material. After travelling nearly a mile, we came to a farm house with barns and outbuildings. On one of these barns were some loose boards. How to get them off without attracting the attention of the guard at the house was the next question, but it was finally done.<sup>36</sup>

While eyewitness accounts record surprise at seeing mounted bands, suggesting the experience was a rarity, there is no way of estimating how many bands were on horseback during the Civil War. There were probably very few, however, in comparison to the total number of bands. In August of 1864 Sargent wrote about traveling through Jefferson, Maryland:

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33. Sargent, *Diary*, 8 December 1861.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Sargent, *Diary*, 2 August 1862.

36. Sargent, *Diary*, 5 and 13 January 1865.

Jefferson is quite a pretty place, passing through it just as the people were coming out of church. I guess that there have not been many troops through here before, because they seemed to be very much surprised and pleased to see a band on horseback, and all white horses, too.<sup>37</sup>

Several personal recollections of civilians of the time also refer to mounted bands. Atlanta resident Mary Rawson recorded the following entry in her diary on September 11, 1864, when she heard the painful reminder proclaimed by one of Sherman's bands that Atlanta had been captured, and would soon be no more:

This afternoon on hearing martial music, we looked up from the front porch where we were sitting to see the street filled with cavalry and infantry pack mules and army wagons and cattle crowded promiscuously [*sic*] together, the cavalry and infantry ensigns floating in unison together. The musicians all riding on white horses. After making the signal for the march to commence they rode silently along until they passed in front of Gen. Gearys [*sic*] headquarters when simultaneously they broke into the old soul stirring "Hail Columbia"; the suddenness of the music startled me. They then, (after finishing the piece) slowly and silently marched through the city.<sup>38</sup>

## Training

Musical training of bandmen and field musicians during the Civil War differed among the two groups. Official training was probably negligible or site-based for bandmen, and training for field musicians (who were often children and adolescents with no musical experience) seems to have varied as well. Many military bands on the other hand, had been formed before the war as professional or town bands. When the war began, entire bands of capable (and probably a few less than capable) musicians enlisted together—thus musical training for these groups was probably seen as unnecessary. Further, because many military bands were unofficial, they received their support from the officers of the regiment—a custom borrowed from Europe and the United Kingdom. Because of this status, there was no central training point for bandmen and bandleaders. Official musical training was provided mainly for regular army field

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37. Sargent, *Diary*, 6 August 1864.

38. Katharine M. Jones, ed., *Heroines of Dixie: Winter of Desperation* (St. Simons, Georgia: Mockingbird Books, Inc., 1988), 150. Rawson was the youngest daughter of E.E. Rawson, one of the city council members, who along with S.C. Wells, and Mayor James M. Calhoun, wrote a letter, also on 11 September 1864, to Major General Sherman, asking him to rescind his order for Atlanta's citizens to evacuate the city. General Sherman denied their request in a letter on the following day.

musicians (fifers, buglers, and drummers) at Fort Columbus (later renamed Fort Jay) on Governor's Island, New York, from the mid-1850s through the end of the war. Musicians of volunteer regiments (such as bugler George Sargent) were expected to learn their duties and skills on the job. Official training for band musicians apparently didn't begin in the U.S. Army until Congress authorized a school for bandleaders in 1911 at the same site, while training for bandsmen didn't begin for another ten years.<sup>39</sup>

Beyond musical training, however, and probably of greater concern to band members would have been developing the skill of playing an instrument while riding a horse—and then in the case of Sheridan's and Custer's bands, learning to accomplish this at the trot or gallop under gunfire. Although horses were a primary means of transportation and power at the time, universal equestrian experience was by no means the norm, and plenty of people did not know how to ride a horse. This is exemplified by an 1861 account given by John C. Linehan of the Fisherville Cornet Band (Penacook, New Hampshire), when its members were selected to perform service for the Governor's Horse Guards, a stylish military organization of the time:

Their engagement ... although a matter of pride, was nevertheless an occasion of dismay, for the boys for the first time in their lives had to play on horseback. As nearly all of them were novices in this direction the outlook was serious, for it is a question if there were half a dozen of the number that had ever straddled a horse.<sup>40</sup>

Methods of riding and playing used by musicians probably varied between bands, but especially according to the instrument played. Little has been recorded about horse guidance in cavalry bands during the Civil War, but accounts of U.S. mounted bands of the 1930s and 1940s, as well as those of contemporary British and European bands, indicate that well-trained horses could be guided by the musicians' knees, as well as by following and relying on horses in front of them during parades. Additionally, trumpeters and other valved and valveless brass instrument players often played with the right hand while guiding the horse with the left. Trombonists have devised ways of playing and riding using a system of double reins with a runner on them, whereby the rider put his arm in the loop, and tightened or loosened it as he moved the slide. Woodwind players, when they were added to the mix, typically wrapped the reins around their arms. Drummers devised different

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39. Kenneth Olson, *Music and Musket*, 84–87.

40. John C. Linehan, in David Arthur Brown, *History of Penacook, New Hampshire* (Concord, New Hampshire: The Rumford Press, 1902), 248–249.

methods of attaching the drum to the saddle and playing with one or both hands while guiding the horse with waist or foot reins.<sup>41</sup>

Horsemanship was probably an individual concern among band members—as was the training of horses to become accustomed to the sounds of musical instruments. While little evidence of the period addresses the training of cavalry band horses, accounts of other bands of other places and times do. The training techniques of the Royal Artillery Mounted Band of Woolwich, England, in the 1930s indicate one of the procedures of acclimating horses to loud abrupt sounds—a method that may have been used in the U.S. during the nineteenth century:

To do this, boys were instructed to go up into the gallery (loft) to make as much noise as possible with dustbin lids, pots, pans and cymbals ... eventually horses became less frightened and gradually no loud or sudden sound, including music, startled or disoriented them.<sup>42</sup>

With this equine music education in mind, George Sargent's diary entry of December 31, 1862, describes what has probably been a problem in all mounted bands at one time or another: "We got a few new horses while here, and for the first few times playing on them they acted wild, but soon got used to it, going as steady as old veterans."<sup>43</sup> Even though horses became accustomed to the sounds of musical instruments, all mounted bandsmen had to be careful of frightening their horses—especially cymbal players, who could easily find themselves thrown, or carried quickly back to the stables or across a field, if they played unexpectedly or too loudly for their mounts' tastes.

Cavalry music was indeed a specialized profession, and bandsmen had to be skilled horsemen as well as accomplished musicians because of the unpredictable nature of their mounts. Of primary concern for all active cavalry units throughout the Civil War was the training and care of horses. Along with their riders, army horses often lived in squalid conditions for months at a time, distanced from adequate food and shelter. On campaigns, bandsmen, along with other cavalrymen, attempted to provide for their steeds by foraging for their horses as well as themselves, as men and animals were forced to live

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41. Gleason, "Horse-Mounted Military Musicians," 28; and Dr. Hubert Henderson, Louisville, Kentucky, e-mail to author, 21 March 2004. Henderson played trumpet and cornet with the Third Cavalry Band at Ft. Myer, Virginia (1941–42). He later served as director of bands at the University of Maryland for ten years, and in 1965 went to the University of Kentucky as the chair of the music department, retiring in 1989.

42. Bruce P. Gleason, "A History of the Royal Artillery Mounted Band, 1878–1939" (M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1985), 14–16.

43. Sargent, *Diary*, 31 December 1862.

together in the open during much of the year. In August 1864, bugler George Sargent wrote about another problem encountered by soldier-musicians—an issue they probably couldn't have been prepared for:

A few days later, the bass tuba player had his instrument (costing \$110) stepped on by a horse, squashing it so that it had to be sent to Boston to be repaired. But we never saw it afterwards, and this reduced the band down considerably, but we managed to keep in playing condition.<sup>44</sup>

### Summary

Examining references to the work of mounted musicians in the Union Army during the Civil War, records indicate that both Sheridan and Custer surely had some belief in the motivating factor of music on the battlefield. Not unlike Saracen cavalry-warrior musicians of centuries before, U.S. Cavalry bandmen of the nineteenth century performed in battle, as well as for ceremonies, tournaments, and at forts.<sup>45</sup> Further, eyewitness recollections of musicians and listeners—together with statements provided by Sheridan and Custer themselves—provide a poignant view of the roles of cavalry musicians, as well as their impact on troops and private citizens. These accounts offer at least a partial explanation of the dichotomy of beauty and tragedy within military music. Evidence of the musical experience of these cavalry musicians is sketchy, but the records that are available indicate that, like infantry bandmen, most of them probably received their musical training before the war through private lessons and as civilians in town bands. Others, like bugler George Sargent (whose diary is a rare and indispensable primary source for mounted band history), received their training on-the-job and under fire on the battlefield.

After the Civil War, mounted bands and field musicians would be utilized in the U.S. only for about another eighty years until World War II, although the tradition still exists in some parts of the world at the time of this writing.

### Recommendations for Further Study

The intent of this study was to add to the body of knowledge of band history by examining the use and training of mounted bands in the Union Army during the Civil War, demonstrating the rich heritage of contemporary band music education, as well as band performance. With these historical aspects in mind, numerous research opportunities exist within military band history in general—including the chronicling of the mounted music tradition in the following eras and regions:

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44. Sargent, *Diary*, 16 August 1864.

45. Gleason, "Horse-Mounted Military Musicians," 3–6.

- Within the Confederate Army during the Civil War: Most research and publications of Civil War bands focus on that of the Union Army. While at least one extensive study exists on bands of the Confederate Army, the author did not uncover any evidence of mounted bands.<sup>46</sup> This is an area to examine more fully.
- In the U.S. from the Indian Wars to World War II
- Within the U.S. National Guard from the 1920s to World War II
- Among the world's remaining mounted bands including those of England, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, France, Senegal, Thailand, India, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Oman, and Italy
- Past bands of all of the countries listed above, as well as those of Canada, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Monaco, Germany, Holland, Morocco, and Russia
- During the Crusades within Moslem history
- Prior to the Crusades within Middle East history

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46. Benny Pryor Ferguson III, "The Bands of the Confederacy: An Examination of the Musical and Military Contributions of the Bands and Musicians of the Confederate States of America" (Ph.D. diss., North Texas State University, 1987); and Benny Ferguson, Rincon, Georgia, telephone interview with author, 20 April 2002. While Ferguson did not find records of mounted bands in the Confederate Army, this was not the intent of his work.