

The Giant Killer -- the 1980s

by Dr. Robert Smith

Confidence. Frustration. Anticipation. The lights faded. Birmingham, AL's, Legion Field fell silent on August 18, 1979.

Supreme confidence -- the Blue Devils (Concord, CA) had again taken no prisoners en route to their third DCI Championship in four years.

Profound frustration -- a stunned Phantom Regiment (Rockford, IL) corps was frozen in second place for the third year in a row after an exhausting campaign.

Wide-eyed anticipation -- Spirit of Atlanta (Atlanta, GA) had just established themselves as a major power. "Next year" was burned into the minds of Atlanta and an old favorite from Revere that had quietly moved up through the ranks to fifth.

No history of the 1980s can be written without a look at the influential year of 1979. At first glance, this year might seem like an average year for DCI up to that time.

The Blue Devils had again won the national title. The top 12 had remained essentially the

same. Thankfully, *Fanfare* from "Rocky" and the *Theme* from "Star Wars" had finally been buried. What was of significance?

The Birmingham championships had essentially unlocked the door to a new geographical region for drum corps competition -- the deep South.

As sleepy fans crawled into Legion Field for the first morning of prelims, a brand-new corps, fresh from a trip to England, was closing their show with a rather unorthodox, but hauntingly beautiful, arrangement of *The First Noel*. Suncoast Sound (Pinellas Park, FL), in its infancy, had entered national competition.

Spirit of Atlanta had roared out of the South in 1979 with a concrete wall of sound and a never-to-be-forgotten, supercharged *Sweet Georgia Brown*. Early, they were unstoppable as they swept through Denver, CO, and defeated the Vanguard at "Drums Along the Rockies."

Steamrolling into Whitewater, WI, for DCI Midwest, Phantom Regiment fell at prelims, but slapped Spirit back at finals. Nevertheless, the

South had become a force to be reckoned with in 1979.

The Birmingham championships solidified the new force, providing a new touring ground and a ground swell of new fans. Quietly, in Memphis, plans were underway to add yet another southern corps to the battalion, one which would surpass even Spirit of Atlanta's first-year performance.

There are two heartbreaking final positions in DCI's top 12 -- second and thirteenth place. In 1979, the Crossmen, who had performed strongly all season, were surprisingly and questionably tripped up in preliminary competition, falling into thirteenth place. In second was a very frustrated drum and bugle corps.

The Midwest was ready in 1979 with the heir apparent to the DCI throne. The Phantom Regiment had devised a virtually flawless and striking program highlighted by Saint Saens' *Organ Symphony* and Wagner's *Elsa's Procession the Cathedral* from "Lohengrin."



CONNECTICUT YANKEES, Stratford, CT (1946).
Photo from the collection of Jack Stenlake.



AURORA MOOSE, Aurora, IL (1949).
Photo from the collection of Jodeen Popp.

They had served their time and come up through the ranks of the mid-1970s. They had lost by a mere tenth of a point in 1978, secondary to a penalty. They again fell short by less than a point.

The 1979 second-place finish by Phantom Regiment is significant in the fact that it was beyond disappointment. It was a near-death blow to Rockford. Although magnificent programs would follow throughout the 1980s, the Regiment would not again attain its former status until 1989, a decade later.

The relative lag of the Midwest, just behind the top-three pack, provided an opening, an opening which was to be filled by the next heir apparent, the 27th Lancers.

Up to 1979, the East had never put forth a DCI champion. Possessing the largest number of units of any one region, the East was rabid for the title. In 1978, the Bridgemen, 27th Lancers, Crossmen and North Star had knocked firmly on the door. However, it was the 27th Lancers who became the chosen ones to whip the unbeatable California corps.

There you have the basis for an analysis of the 1980s, the greatest decade of drum corps competition in the history of the activity. The South was firmly entrenched. The Midwest had seemingly run out of steam and perhaps the will to fight. But the 27th Lancers were ready for battle. What follows is legendary . . .

1980

The 27th Lancers essentially had no off-season during the winter of 1979-1980. Through the fall months, the corps stayed together and was goal-oriented, working toward their magnificent guest appearance at the 1980 Lake Placid Winter Olympic Games. The corps' participation to this day remains a pinnacle of achievement for the drum and bugle corps activity.

When the new decade of drum corps competition dawned in June, the Lancers debuted with a trend-setting drill, powerful musical book and dazzling color guard. This color guard, in particular, may represent the highest point of excitement and sheer equipment execution ever attained in DCI history and may never be equaled in the fans' hearts.

The 27th Lancers were in the enviable position of leading the East Coast powers in an assault on the DCI crown. The Lancers, with the Bayonne Bridgemen literally licking their

heels in late season, rolled from city to city with one impressive victory after another. Bested only by the Blue Devils on tour, the Lancers stood firm at DCI East, winning that title one week before DCI Finals.

As *Danny Boy* drew to a close on that steamy Birmingham night, George Zingali, 27th's cutting-edge drill designer, left his seat and descended the stairs, waving his coat in a frenzy. It was an indication of victory from a veteran corpsman. The applause was deafening. The crowd and corps smelled victory.

Backed by strong finals performances from the Bridgemen, Crossmen, Garfield Cadets and North Star, the East had literally controlled the finals competition.

Unanticipated was the fact that Concord had a new record to set with its next title -- four DCI Championships, an unprecedented total and, most importantly, one up on its arch rival, the Santa Clara Vanguard. The West Coast jazz again flowed smoothly and powerfully from the bells and yet another super corps that seemed unbeatable fell at California's feet.

The 27th Lancers and the East were hard-hit by this loss in 1980 and the corps would never recover from it. Next to the 1978-1979 Phantom Regiment losses and the late 1980s bridesmaid Vanguard finishes, this defeat ranks as the most heartbreaking of all in DCI competitions. The 27th Lancers were never the same again.

No less significant was the realignment of the top 12 in 1980. The Bridgemen skyrocketed to an unheard-of third-place finish on the strength of their percussion and brass scores. Spirit of Atlanta, an early-season favorite for the DCI title, was stunned in mid-June by a tragic accident and the death of their brass instructor, Jim Ott.

Ott had written perhaps his greatest brass book ever for the 1980 Atlanta corps, whose wall of sound has not been equaled. Spirit fell just 0.8 short of the DCI crown. The Blue Stars fell from the ranks of the top 12 for the first time in DCI history, sliding into thirteenth place and were replaced by the overhauled Garfield Cadets, a corps that would soon own the 1980s.

The regional influence

Prior to the 1970s, the major regions interacted relatively little with each other outside of the yearly national championship shows (VFW, American Legion, etc.). The

extensive tour schedules of today were unknown as the activity was divided, for all practical purposes, into the East and Midwest.

Until the entry of the California corps in the early 1970s and the southern units in the late 1970s, the activity was essentially confined to east of the Mississippi River. The Troopers were very prominent, but isolated. By 1980, the country was distinctly divided into four regions of influence -- East, West, Midwest and South.

What happened during the 1980s was startling. Overall the total of corps declined from about 250 units in 1980 to around 110 active units by decades' end. It has always been difficult to estimate the number of corps in the "active" category. The 1980 DCI program listed 66 competing corps in all classes and the 1988 program listed approximately 75.

The causes of this rapid decline in the sheer number of drum corps are obvious, including economic considerations involved in running even a smaller corps in the 1980s. The extensive touring required represented a burden most corps could not bear and the always-present pressure to "make finals" poses a threat to this day.

Behind the scenes, the activity shrunk, even collapsed on itself, with the top 25 representing a pleasant facade to the deep problems the activity faced. The organization powers did recognize by decades' end that if the smaller corps' population was not stabilized and a performance forum provided, the very existence of the drum and bugle corps activity would be in jeopardy.

Nowhere did the activity decline more than on the East Coast. "Crumble" would be a more accurate description. In 1980, the East Coast corps firmly held 48% of the top 25 positions and an amazing 42% of the top 12. By 1988, just three East Coast corps -- the Cadets, Crossmen and Boston Crusaders -- would appear in the top 25.

Why the demise of so many East Coast corps? The explanation appears multifactorial. In the 1970s, corps sat on top of corps geographically. No region could sustain the number of corps that existed in the East once the drum and bugle corps activity left its local base.

This loss of the "local base" was another 1980s phenomenon, when membership of the major corps shifted to a national level in terms of recruiting. The truly "local" corps, long the



IMPERIALS, Los Angeles, CA (approx. 1955).
Photo from the collection of Chris Hollenback.



REGIMENTAL CADETS, Staten Island, NY (1964).
Photo from the collection of Mickie Weiler.



WEBSTER CITY POST, Webster City, IA (1928).
Photo from the collection of Robert Zinko/American Legion archives.

foundation of the activity, died out.

One very evident example of this was the loss of the local base in LaCrosse, WI, which, because of geographical isolation, effectively killed the nationally-competitive Blue Stars by the mid-1980s.

One could not look at a map of the East Coast without noting the presence of a small or large corps in nearly every major city. The resources, money and members were bound to run out as the major corps began to compete with each other off the field.

A drum corps institution, the Garfield Cadets, one of the nation's oldest units, won the competition for talent both in staff and members. Paradoxically, out of the ashes of 27th's defeat and the East Coast collapse emerged the East Coast knight that would finally find the Holy Grail.

Solidification and consolidation produced the long-awaited Eastern champion that broke all standing ovations. But at what a cost? Subsequently, North Star, Bridgemen and 27th Lancers and Holy Family Defenders faded into history, with only the Boston Crusaders and Crossmen clinging onto life.

In the South, a flurry of activity hit after the two Birmingham events. Several small corps sprang up in a region where most people had never even heard of a drum and bugle corps. The area established its own circuit (Drum Corps South) and a championship in the early 1980s.

But only three units would have any staying power -- Spirit of Atlanta, Suncoast Sound and Florida Wave. Spirit and Suncoast provided each other with the level of competitiveness needed to remain national powers.

One curious flash-in-the-pan corps was formed by George Lindstrom in Memphis. Long associated with the Racine Kilties, Lindstrom organized an effort which would surpass Spirit of Atlanta's first-year performance record of 1977.

The Memphis Blues Brass Band stormed into twentieth place at the 1980 finals, a record finish for any first-year corps up to that time. Sadly, this crowd favorite would survive only three seasons, unable to complete the 1983 season.

The South entered the decade with an eight percent share of the top 25, finishing in 1989 with 12 percent, remaining a relative constant competitive force throughout the 1980s.

Way out west, California corps continued a domination of the activity, carving up successive DCI Championships in 1980, 1981 and 1982. DCI Finals became routine and predictable as the fans hungered for a new challenger.

To this day, this year-after-year success has been unequaled by any one region and, in fact, was quite mystical. The East, Midwest and South seemed unable to capture the "magic" of the West.

Each year, the Eastern and Midwestern corps waited in anticipation of California's eastward migration to competition. And, each year, the challengers seemed prepared, perhaps overly so at times.

Five additional DCI trophies returned to California during the 1980s and five barely slipped through their grasp. The West remained a constant geographical influence, with 20 percent of the top 25 in 1980 and a full quarter of the finalists in 1989.

The Midwest averted a near-disaster of East Coast proportions with the influx of new blood following the demise of the Guardsmen (to class A/60 status), Blue Stars (to class A/60 status) and the Kilties from finals competition.

The Midwest, in contrast to the other major regions, showed major growth throughout the latter half of the 1980s. The Madison Scouts (Madison, WI), Cavaliers (Rosemont, IL) and Phantom Regiment (Rockford, IL) held the line for several years before the Star of Indiana (Bloomington, IN), Bluecoats (Canton, OH) and Sky Ryders (Hutchinson, KS) entered into Drum Corps Midwest competition.

The Cavaliers scaled the rungs of the top 12, moving up the DCI ladder past the Scouts and Regiment, to establish themselves as a major power. Green suddenly became the most threatening color to California eyes.

By 1988, the Midwest could firmly boast of 50% of the top 12 and 35 % of the top 25 units. (In calculating statistics for the decade, the Sky Ryders were not assigned to any region prior to 1987 when they actively competed in Drum Corps Midwest shows and attained full membership in 1988. (They were briefly members of Drum Corps South.)

The Midwest produced a champion in 1988 (Madison Scouts) and the Cavaliers were an ever-present threat as the curtain fell in 1989.

Disappointedly, the Canadian role in DCI was an important, yet minor one. The

willingness of the Canadian corps to compete in DCI maintained a true international flavor. No Canadian corps broke into the top 12 in the decade, although Dutch Boy was poised to do so on several occasions.

Canada had no top 25 corps in 1980, showed promise in 1986 with five corps in the running and consistently fielded two to three top 25 members.

The program

The musical program and drill design underwent explosive growth during the 1980s. In 1980, the top 12 competing units were playing a musical book that averaged five separate selections, much the same as had been done for the previous 20 years.

The DCI Champion Concord Blue Devils' repertoire that year contained seven different jazz pieces. Pop music of the day continued to play a prominent role in the repertoires. By 1988, a startling transformation had occurred -- eight of the top 12 were performing musical books that expanded on only one musical idea.

One must look to the Rockford corps of 1981 to find the spark that was to ignite a new era of musical production. Hoping to improve their national standing, the Phantom Regiment developed an outstanding production based solely on Aram Khatchaturian's *Spartacus*.

Coincidentally, Khatchaturian's *Gayne Ballet* had dominated most of Santa Clara's repertoire in 1978-1979.

Rockford, in 1981, performed a "total concept" show, which, unknown to the drum corps world, would become the gold standard by decade's end. Audience reaction, although initially mixed, fueled the movement, despite required in-the-stands reading of a *Spartacus* information pamphlet distributed by volunteers before the show.

The show was popular and challenging enough to retain for an additional season in 1982 in an improved form. The corps fell short of their first championship, but the new seed planted by Rockford took firm root.

The repertoire continued to expand exponentially in 1982. Although works of American composers -- such as Bernstein, Copland and Gershwin -- had played a recurring role in drum corps programs, they were now brought to the forefront by two corps -- the Garfield Cadets in the infancy of their rebuilding program and the Santa Clara Vanguard.



TOTENVILLE VIGILANTES, Staten Island, NY (1953).
Photo from the collection of Wes Myers.



ROYAL BLUES, Staten Island, NY (1948).
Photo from the collection of Ray Priestler.

In the first season of their rise to prominence, the Garfield Cadets developed a relatively unexplored musical book consisting of Ron Nelson's *Rocky Point Holiday* and Gershwin's *Cuban Overture* and *Concerto in F*. These pieces, with driving yet varied tempos, perfectly matched the new style of marching introduced that same year.

Of further note, Santa Clara closed their show with *Appalachian Spring*, which would become the first in a long line of Aaron Copland productions. Santa Clara can also be credited with the first pianissimo (soft) ending to a show, quite a contrast to the sometimes deafening company fronts of old.

In the Midwest, the Cavaliers tackled the enormously difficult *Pines of Rome* as they began a slow conversion to more serious music.

This Americana "flavor" brought freshness to the activity and eventually a new champion in 1983 in the Garfield Cadets. The Cadets, through innovation in drill, music and general approach to drum corps competition, became the long-sought-after "giant killer" that finally tumbled the California juggernauts from the drum corps throne.

The new music was so well-received that the Cadets would build an unprecedented three-in-a-row national title streak upon the little-known Leonard Bernstein repertoire.

The Cadets performed what must be considered the definitive treatment of *West Side Story* in 1984, bringing a deafening hush to the field in Atlanta when the final notes of *Maria* fell upon the crowd.

Three years later the Cadets performed what many consider the best production ever fielded in the drum corps arena, a full-length version of Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. Coupling drum corps and dance, the ballet was staged and flawlessly executed, including a dramatic silent exit backfield.

The oldest active, nationally-competitive corps in the history of the activity, the Cadets had fallen well below the top 12 right up to 1980. By 1983, the corps reached the apex of the activity, crowned the first non-California DCI champion since the 1975 Madison Scouts.

Unbeaten except for DCI Preliminaries in Miami, the Cadets had targeted the championship as far back as 1979. Dr. Richard Santo, along with his successor, George Hopkins, had formulated the philosophy and goals which culminated in the 1983 perfect

season.

Drill wizard George Zingali was brought on board in 1982. Michael Cesario coordinated the program and had this to say: "One of the things we felt was that marching was a type of dance. It was a controlled way of moving the body and it seemed to us that there was a way to integrate a modern and a ballet approach to dance onto a kind of marching program that we wanted to see.

"For us, it isn't dance and marching, but rather, one kind of extension of the whole thing." More than anything, the Cadets owned the "field of the 1980s."

Phantom Regiment began their long association with Tchaikovsky in 1983, including "1812 Overture," a piece many had drooled over, but reluctantly dismissed as unperformable. Years later, Michael Cesario would play a role in bringing a stunning "white ballet" concept to Rockford, incorporating "Swan Lake."

The music became very difficult. "Difficult" hardly does justice to the furious tempos, rhythms and ranges that would become the competitive standard as the decade progressed. Two major events occurred in 1985 -- the return of the "theme" show and the first production of a musical repertoire written exclusively for the drum corps arena.

The always-innovative Suncoast Sound introduced their breezy "Florida Suite" written by Robert Smith and the newly-developed corporate corps of the 1980s, Star of Indiana, marched a complex show to the simple yet effective tunes of Walt Disney.

Premiering in Bloomington, IL, on a mid-June night (and curiously introduced wrongly as the "Star of India") they were instantly welcomed into the hearts of the new-found fans.

The Sky Ryders introduced their first "show" production in 1985 and 1986 which garnered unsuspected audience participation in the "Wizard of Oz." Entire Broadway productions of "The Sound of Music," "West Side Story" and "Camelot" would follow in later years, none equaling the sheer joy of the "Oz" shows.

The new music of the 1980s cried out for a similar advancement in drill design and maneuverability. Foreshadowing this advance, the 1980 Santa Clara Vanguard had attempted to introduce a complex new drill form for their "Planets" production number.

The corps was never able to master this design by season's end and fell out of the top three for the first time in DCI's history, sliding into seventh place. This change was somewhat premature against the backdrop of the 1980 season. The misfire had proven that changes in the drill portion of the program were far more risky than changes in the music.

"Often imitated, but never duplicated," one man's style of drill would forever change the face of drum corps. George Zingali's early association with the 27th Lancers would drag the drum corps community "kicking and screaming" away from the 50-yard line.

Long thought the center of the drum corps universe, the "fifty huggers" cried blasphemy and looked past to what had to be a passing craze. Although the 27th Lancers should be credited with the introduction of the new marching style, it was the 1982 Garfield Cadets who sold it to the masses.

There, in Alton, IL, in the early summer of 1982, the "new" Garfield Cadets approached the Midwestern giants with a striking new way . . . of running. True, it took one year for the stalwart drum corps community to accept the change, but one year later they were honoring it in Miami.

The East -- and only the East -- led the way to use the total field in the total concept show. Remember the sliding, massive drills of the 27th Lancers, the ultimate "scatter" formation of the Garfield Cadets and the magnificent "Z-pull" brought three consecutive championship shows to an end.

It was almost comical to watch the imitators grope with the new marching style, much as a child learning to walk. Catastrophes and even injuries occasionally resulted from the furious movements.

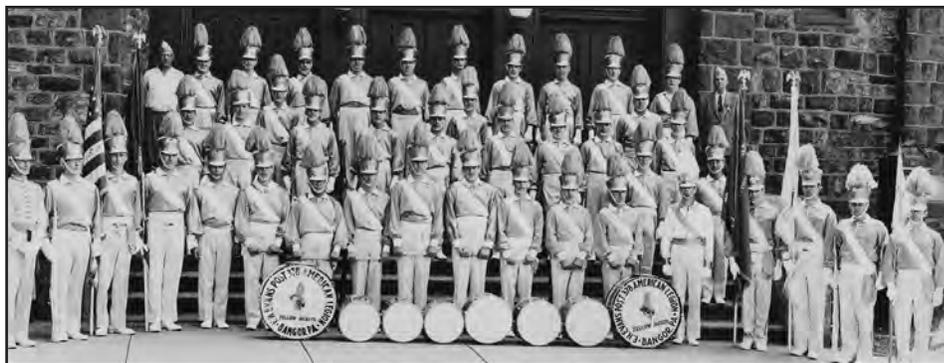
The field was now limitless, as all rules of drill design were off. Asymmetry, not mirror images on the 50, prevailed. The drill was mathematical, calculated to precision, with one mis-step leading to disaster.

Mathematical drill design was the "official" line, but legend has it that more than one of the famous Zingali drill patterns were devised by cutting up rubber bands and letting them fall as they may on to a table.

An increased physical demand was placed on each member. While sections scattered far across the field, the traditionally blocked percussion section was eventually included.



MORRISTOWN COLONIALS, Morristown, NJ (1950).
Photo from the collection of Jack Stenlake.



YELLOW JACKETS, Bangor, PA (1948).
Photo from the collection of Jack Stenlake.

One DCI Midwest Whitewater crowd was witness to the destruction of five soprano bugles and minor injuries to four members when a slick field wreaked havoc on the Cadet's quick backward movement at the end of their production.

By the close of the decade, the new style was commonplace and had infiltrated all levels of the activity, including the smallest corps. Experienced observers, however, could detect yet another new style sleepily lying in the drill designs of both the Cavaliers and the Madison Scouts.

Both corps marched near impossible drills in 1988 and both mastered them well, with the Scouts' perfect sets catapulting them to a surprise DCI title. There was tornado-like movement, asymmetry and expansive coverage of the field, as required by the 1980s standard. There was also something else, difficult to pinpoint or describe precisely, but subtly present -- the new need for the 1990s.

The corporate corps

An exciting advertisement appeared on the back page of *Drum Corps World* in the fall of 1984, rocking the drum corps establishment.

James Mason, director of the Dubuque Colts, had been employed by Cook Group Companies of Bloomington, IN, to establish a brand-new corps. The corps was to be like no other, with no recurring theme and a fast-changing, year-by-year repertoire. Thus was born the Star of Indiana.

Well-funded from the start, Star of Indiana boasted the top talents in drum corps design including: George Zingali, Dennis DeLucia, Jim Prime and Peggy Twigg, a drum corps "dream team." Cook Group, a producer of medical supplies, became the first United States corporation to sponsor and entirely fund a drum and bugle corps from the bottom up, with an initial one million dollar grant.

Star of Indiana started instantly with new uniforms, equipment and transportation, although with a reported annual budget that was below the top drum corps powers of the time. This funding "upped the ante" in drum corps competition, although it would not be felt for several seasons to come.

Star of Indiana brought new blood (and money) to Drum Corps International, along with a throng of new fans in an untapped drum corps region.

Bill Cook, the CEO of Cook Group, became

a familiar face to the drum corps activity. He had first been exposed to drum corps when attending the local Bloomington, IN, DCI tour show.

Cook's son marched for several years with the Colts of Dubuque, IA, then under the direction of Mason. By decade's end, Cook and Mason would lead a tremendously successful new DCI regional, DCI Mid-America. Through the new organization's effort, a drum corps superpower was born.

Reflecting on the 1985 season, Mason said, "Our goals were very humble. We said that no matter what we do, we'll be better than last year. We didn't have any placement goals. We felt we had an obligation to the activity to set some new standards in regard to fund-raising; to show that other corps can get involved with corporate funding.

"I think our largest responsibility is not to abuse this privilege and to set an example for other corps to follow." Thus, DCI began its greatest experiment -- a litmus test for future drum corps expansion by corporate grant.

The first season of competition, 1985, would see Star of Indiana finish in the highest position of a first-year new corps, tenth at DCI in Madison, WI. This shattered the previous record of the 1980 Memphis Blues (twentieth) and 1977 Spirit of Atlanta (twenty-second) in their inaugural years. (The Bleu Raiders from Kenner, LA, actually jumped into the first DCI Finals at Whitewater in 1972, but they were actually a merger corps.)

Star of Indiana performed a very pleasing repertoire based on Disney tunes including *Zip-a-dee-doo-dah* and *When You Wish Upon a Star*, which would become its signature song.

"The bulk of our kids came from high school and college programs in Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio -- kids who had read about the corps being formed in the papers," said Dennis DeLucia.

"This was a new experience for all of us, because we had to build it up from the ground level. And, of course, on top of it all, they're doing a Zingali drill, which is very involved; motion all the time."

"This thing grew into a monster," said color guard instructor Alyssa Cimino. "It started so smoothly -- we were putting together a new drum corps from Indiana -- but suddenly it was apparent this show had a lot of potential and it might be a contender for the top 12.

"That wasn't a priority at first, but it kept moving in that direction."

Despite its top-level staff, Star of Indiana would not seriously challenge the DCI superpowers during the latter half of the 1980s. The "no theme" corps would keep its promise with an ever-changing repertoire that took audiences from Disneyland to outer space, the circus, a Gershwin folk opera and England.

At times, the corps would literally show up to the field with truck loads of props and gadgets. However, each year brought the corps to a new level of maturity, where eventually these props became cumbersome and unnecessary.

By 1989, Star rose to sixth place at DCI Finals, landing just behind the Cadets, clearly positioned for a run at the title.

In retrospect, 1985-1989 was Star of Indiana's "honeymoon" period with drum and bugle corps. By 1990, the corps' influence, both financial and political, was substantial and would eventually alter the fans' perception of this corps' role in national competition.

The corps of the 1980s

The members of Drum Corps International changed dramatically over the decade of the 1980s. Another generation of marchers passed through the activity and left their empty shoes behind. Many superpower corps of the 1970s ceased to exist, under financial and membership pressures. Seven corps were consistent finishers in the elite DCI top 12.

The Concord, CA, Blue Devils were again crowned DCI champions three times during the 1980s -- in 1980, 1982 and 1986. The 1980 victory was unprecedented, bringing their total titles to four, more than any other DCI unit.

Nearly one-third of the time, Concord reigned over the DCI finalists, almost always winning the brass caption. In 1986, the corps tied the highest score to date of a DCI Champion, 98.40.

The Blue Devils remained firmly entrenched and bathed in jazz. The corps finished in the top three each year except 1987 when they slipped into fourth. Rebounding in 1988 with a uniform change, mellow music and a mature corps, BD remained undefeated until a surprise Madison finish and Santa Clara Vanguard surge pushed them into third.

This was the year of the infamous "secret scores" experiment that was never repeated. Performance order was scrambled. Scores were



HAWTHORNE CABALLEROS, Hawthorne, NJ (1988).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.



GRENADIERS, Bremerton, WA (approx. 1973).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.

allegedly kept secret from preliminaries. Near chaos resulted, challenging the very validity of the finals scores.

One single word describes the Santa Clara Vanguard -- class. Since their entry into national competition in the late 1960s, the Vanguard was the only corps to perform at all DCI Finals competitions through 1989.

In 1980, they fell from the top three for the first time ever because of an experimental drill design. The following year, the corps rocketed to number one again, capturing their fourth DCI title.

During the 1980s, the corps was the bridesmaid time and time again, landing in second place a record five times -- in 1982, 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988 -- all by the narrowest of margins.

The music of Copland was a solid foundation early in the decade before the corps moved to stunning Russian pageantry in the mid-1980s. In 1988, the Vanguard unveiled a brilliant adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Phantom of the Opera." The revised 1989 version would bring them another DCI title, in Kansas City, and director Gail Royer's final DCI win.

The Vanguard brought a "sense of occasion" to each performance and were always the biggest competitive threat to any front-runner by season's end. Unquestionably, SCV was the "essence" of drum corps during the 1980s.

Little remains to be said of the rise to fame of the Cadets of Bergen County in the 1980s. A well-planned building program, with calculated expansion and striking innovation in both music and marching, catapulted the corps to three straight unprecedented DCI titles.

The corps left many crowds breathless and the anxious anticipation of the 1985 first-place score may never again be experienced by fan or corps. The Cadets set a goal and the corps succeeded beyond their loftiest expectations. Overnight they became a national power and the sole serious contender from the East.

The Cadets shared the highest score of the 1980s with the Blue Devils, reaching 98.40 in 1985. The masters at cleaning the drill, the corps consistently showed the most progress in the least amount of time, almost patenting the "late season" surge.

The Cadets, along with the Madison Scouts, celebrated their 50th Anniversary during the 1980s. Once considered a flash-in-the-pan corps by skeptics, the Cadets remain an activity

leader today.

No one was more surprised by the 1988 championships finish than the Madison Scouts. Tears that flowed down members' faces were proof enough. The finals performance brought the crowd to a frenzy in *Malagueña*; the announcement of scores resulted in chaos. The Scouts had unexpectedly and finally won their second DCI title after 13 years.

Celebrating their 50th Anniversary with a trip to Europe, the corps was not considered a serious contender until Kansas City prelims when the spectacular visuals materialized and the drill sets became textbook perfect.

One of the last of the all-male units, the Scouts also reached a high point early in the decade with a commanding win over all DCI units at the 10th Anniversary DCI Midwest competition Whitewater, WI. The Scouts entertained countless crowds throughout the 1980s and defined the word "showmanship."

Phantom Regiment remained the Midwestern front-runner, but did not capture the elusive DCI title during the 1990s. The unquestioned masters of classicism, the corps underwent several style changes.

They won nearly every regional championship, defeating all other drum corps during the decade, but were often cursed by "peaking too early."

A devastating tenth-place DCI finish in 1986 demanded a style change and the Regiment displayed the most strikingly beautiful transformation in drum corps history.

Pure white uniforms perfectly matched the elegant "Songs from the Winter Palace" production of Tchaikovsky ballets in 1987. At one time or another, the corps presented nearly the entire basic classical repertoire, many times choosing some of the darker scores, such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Symphonie Fantastique*.

The Phantom Regiment made classical music fashionable in drum corps circles. Rockford's highest finish of the decade was second place in 1989, a performance which once again demanded the crown in many fans' eyes.

The Rosemont Cavaliers showed consistent improvement throughout the 1980s and established themselves as a national power and annual contender, a position they were far distant from in 1980. Their rise to power nearly paralleled that of the Cadets, although it was much more gradual.

The most dramatic style change occurred in 1985 when the corps moved to an entire classical repertoire from a mixed program in the mid-1980s. This propelled the unit to fifth place and positioned them for a run at the title in 1986 when they placed third. The Cavaliers were on the cutting edge of flag and rifle work throughout the decade.

Heralded as "Baby Blue" in their infancy, the Spirit of Atlanta's admiration for the Concord Blue Devils was apparent and in less than three years from their first practice they were challenging the Devils for the title in 1980.

One of the only horn lines to actually shake a concrete stadium, Spirit began the 1980s with a trademark wall of sound. National ranking fell off sharply after the original contingent of members aged out and a young corps held onto twelfth place in 1982. The corps rebounded in 1983 with a new-wave guard and was challenging the drum corps powers again by 1986.

Radical style changes, including new uniforms, debuted in 1988 behind a repertoire based on Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, as the corps fell to ninth. Disappointingly, the corps slipped from the top 12 for the first time in 1989, again on the choice of music, *Interstellar Suite*.

Spirit of Atlanta can be credited with introducing a whole new geographical region to the drum corps activity and inspiring many new Southern units. They were a consistent drum corps superpower in the 1980s.

The drum corps activity's roster has always been a state of constant flux -- corps form and corps fold. The 1980s saw great losses to the drum corps community. The 27th Lancers, founding member of DCI, placed in the top 12 from 1980 through 1984, with narrow misses in 1985 and 1986. They folded after the 1986 season.

The Bayonne Bridgemen, who narrowly missed the DCI trophy in 1980, performed at DCI Finals through 1983 and folded following the 1986 season.

North Star, another Cinderella corps of the 1970s, failed to make finals after 1980, but competed through 1983.

The Blue Stars, Guardsmen and Kilties, all prominent corps on the scene in the 1970s, dropped from the DCI ranks and existed for a time as smaller class A units.

In addition, the bugles fell silent for Alliance of Greater Boston, Argonauts, Avant Garde,



BLUE ROCK, Wilmington, DE (1968).
Photo by Moe Knox.



MADISON SCOUTS, Madison, WI (1968).
Photo by Moe Knox.



DES PLAINES VANGUARD, Des Plaines, IL (1968).
Photo by Moe Knox.

Holy Family Defenders, Long Island Kingsmen, Pride of Cincinnati, Rivermen, Royal Brigade, Royal Crusaders, San Jose Raiders, Seattle Imperials, Valley Fever and many more during the decade.

These corps provided excellent opportunities for youth to travel North America in spectacular drum corps competition and gave the activity hundreds of entertaining, exciting and eventful performances.

New corps entered DCI competition as well. Rejuvenated in 1986, the Bluecoats entered the top 12 in 1987 and returned in 1988 and 1989 on the strength of a big band style and outstanding soloists.

The Sky Ryders climbed up the rankings, becoming one of the great show corps of the decade. They appeared in five DCI Finals during the 1980s (and one more time in 1991 at Dallas, TX, their new hometown).

Inching their way toward finals competition at the outset of the decade, Suncoast Sound, the second of the Southern drum corps powers, cracked the top 12 in 1983. By 1986, Suncoast landed squarely in the thick of competition, finishing fifth.

Frequently sporting an original repertoire and never considered traditional, the corps performed a bizarre, yet well-received composition in 1988 titled "Symphonic Dances for the Contemporary Child in Four Movements." The Florida-based unit appeared at all finals shows from 1983 to 1989.

Replacing the Bridgemen as the DCI "fun-loving," crazy corps, the Velvet Knights leapt into DCI Finals in 1984, delivering wild shows to well-primed fans. They remained a top 12 finalist through 1989.

Four corps deserve special mention as consistent top 25 finishers during the 1980s. The Boston Crusaders succeeded in performing solid programs despite recurrent financial difficulties. The corps missed the top 25 in 1982 and peaked in fourteenth position in 1987.

DCI Finalists in 1981 through 1985, the Sacramento Freelancers went inactive in 1986 for a season. They have been one of the only corps to break from competition at will and return successfully the following year. By 1989, they were back in the top 12.

An Eastern power at the 1980 finals, the Crossmen never dropped from the DCI top 25 despite extreme difficulties during the mid-1980s. They moved to a smooth jazz repertoire

and edged back into DCI Finals in 1989, finishing twelfth.

Throughout the 1980s, the Casper, WY, Troopers maintained their position in competition and in the hearts of the fans. The corps was a DCI Finalist in 1981, 1985 and 1986. Founder and drum corps legend Jim Jones retired as director in 1986.

Other corps appearing on the national scene were: the Geneseo Knights (Geneseo, IL), Colts (Dubuque, IA), Dutch Boy (Kitchener, ONT), Glassmen (Toledo, OH), Florida Wave (Miami, FL), Blue Knights (Denver, CO), Marauders (Longview, WA), Spartans (Vancouver, WA), Ventures (Kitchener, ONT) and L'Insolite (St Jerome, QUE).

The decade of the 1980s will be known as an explosive time of drum and bugle corps growth in design and performance levels, a time the activity truly became an art form. The designers and arrangers pushed the upper limits of an individual member's capabilities to new heights never before reached.

What once was methodical and military became unrestricted and furiously paced. New undiscovered repertoires, once thought impossible to perform, were translated to the drum corps arena.

The drum corps powers were realigned. What routinely was a predictable contest between two California corps and a challenger,

was turned into a six-corps free-for-all by 1989. This new competitive environment breathed fresh air into what once was nearly stagnation.

Uniforming, equipping, feeding and transporting a major drum and bugle corps placed tremendous financial burdens on the organizations, threatening their very existence and sending budgets commonly into six figures and beyond.

The DCI founders began to retire, subtle events that would have profound and far-reaching effects into the 1990s.

Drum Corps International had succeeded perhaps far beyond the dreams of its founders. The seeds planted in 1971 reached full fruition during the 1980s. The corps had controlled their destiny and were free to explore all the dimensions of an American football field.

August 19, 1989, Arrowhead Stadium, Kansas City, MO -- 10 years had passed since Phantom Regiment had been this close to their first DCI Championship. The last note of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Music of the Night* evaporated from the Santa Clara Vanguard's horns. Gail Royer, perhaps modern drum corps' greatest genius, looked upon his corps' last DCI trophy, again plucked from the deserving Phantom Regiment by a narrow margin and a California hand.

A casual observer might conclude little had changed in the decade past . . .

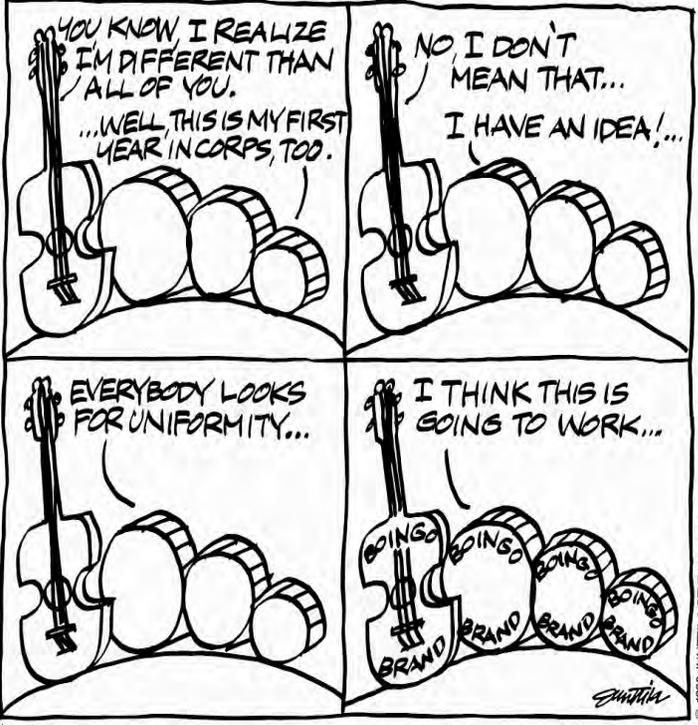
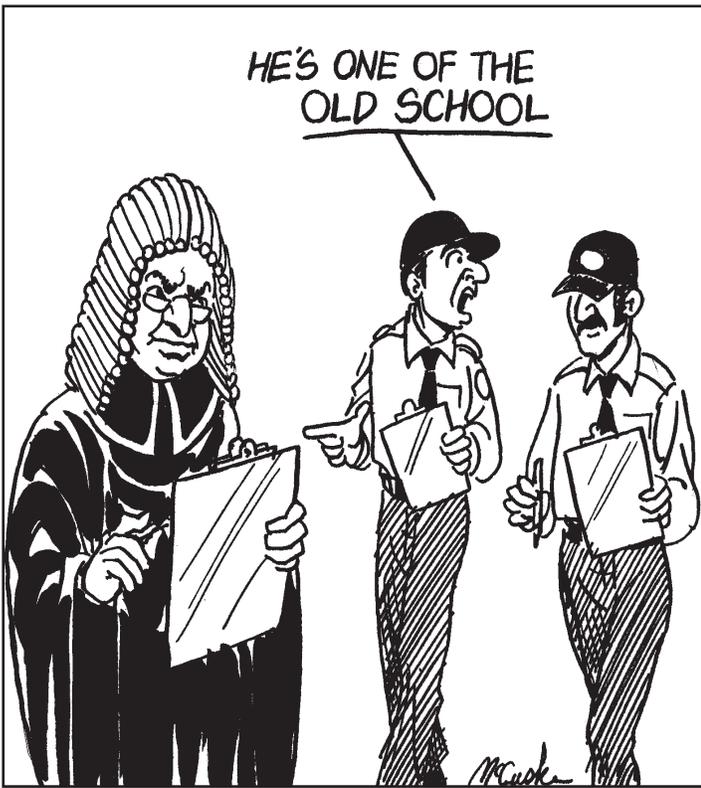


STARDUSTERS, Arabi, LA (1968).
Photo by Moe Knox.



CHATELAINES ALL-GIRL, Laval, QUE (1971).
Photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World.

APPLE CORPS™ by David Junttila



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BEYNON'S FUNNIES



SPECTACLE CITY MARINERS, Greendale, WI (1969).
Photo by Moe Knox.



FIRE-ETTES ALL-GIRL, Norwich, CT (1965).
Photo by Moe Knox.



JOANETTES ALL-GIRL, Leominster, MA (1968).
Photo by Moe Knox.