


Kingston Grenadiers, 1996 (photo by Alan Winslow from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Kingston Grenadiers

by Rick Jutras

Since 1995, the Kingston Grenadiers from Kingston, ONT, have been a fixture on the Drum Corps Associates scene, but when the corps began in 1961, it performed as a parade unit. Since then, it has taken the form of a parade and concert/exhibition corps, as well as a competitive corps, on two occasions prior to 1995. Yet the corps' beginning was as a military trumpet band.

During the 1960s, many reserve force units in Canada had musical support elements or bands and, in many cases, these took the form of trumpet bands. These were, in fact, drum and bugle corps, because they used bugles.

In the case of the regimental band in Kingston, it too took this form and was part of the local militia infantry regiment known as The Princess of Wales' Own Regiment, known in the city as the PWOR.

There were two main tasks for the band. One was to provide musical support for the regiment during unit functions. The second was to serve as a public relations and recruiting tool of the regiment by raising the profile of the PWOR around the region.

It was while performing this second role that the foundation for the Grenadiers' birth was set.

While representing the PWOR at various events, the members came in contact with civilian drum and bugle corps. The PWOR band members were immediately influenced and the transformation was underway.

After exclusively playing music that was martial in nature, music that was more popular crept into their repertoire. The result? The band become more like a civilian corps and less like the military band it had been for many years.

It was during a unit function, with the commanding officer inspecting the members of the regiment, that this "new" band would lead to the demise of the PWOR trumpet band

and the birth of a drum corps.

As the commanding officer of the PWOR, made his way around the ranks, one can only imagine what he felt as he heard the band strike up a rousing rendition of *Papa Loves Mambo*, made famous by Perry Como.

Almost immediately the order was cut by the commanding officer for members of the band to return all instruments and uniforms and resume training in the role of infantrymen. The members of the now former band had other ideas.

They had come to enjoy performing in a style that resembled the corps they had seen in various concerts and exhibitions. So rather than continue with the PWOR, they decided the allure of drum corps was such that they would quit the military and start their own corps. An organizing meeting was held and work began. Kingston was going to have a drum and bugle corps.

In order for the venture to succeed, a number of things were required, not the least of which were money, instruments and uniforms. Spiro Sakell had served the former band as both horn instructor and drum major. His skills led to his selection as the Grenadiers' first president/director.

Next, if there was to be a corps, there was

somewhat known as "The Limestone City." Thus, the first corps name was the Limestone City Grenadiers. May 1961 marked the first performance of the Grenadiers, who were invited to participate in a parade coinciding with a convention of the Lions Club.

The Grenadiers made an immediate impression. To quote from the local newspaper, *The Kingston Whig Standard*, "One of the highlights of the Lions Club Parade, held Saturday, was the exciting music from Kingston's newest band, the Grenadiers. The people who lined the street were delighted by the local band's exciting music."

During the remainder of the 1960s, the Grenadiers continued to perform in parades in and around Kingston, as well as in the United States. In 1963, the members decided to change the name to more readily reflect the corps' hometown and it was changed to the Kingston Grenadiers Drum and Bugle Corps.

From 1961 to the spring of 1963, the Grenadiers performed mainly as a parade corps, but the ambition to enter field competition was there. As a result, in 1963 the corps began performing field shows in the Canadian Drum Corps Association circuit.

In 1968, the Grenadiers won the Canadian Drum Corps Association Senior "B" National Championship.

In 1972, under the guidance of Director John Raymond, the corps began competition in the Red Carpet Association. At the Grenadiers' first RCA Championships, they placed sixth with a score of 67.30.

At the 1973 RCA Championships, the corps placed fifth, scoring 63.80. One of the corps' highlights during 1973 coincided with the city of Kingston's tercentenary celebration. To mark the occasion, the city was visited by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales, Prince Philip. The Grenadiers had the honor of performing for Her Majesty's arrival.

In 1974, the Grenadiers finished the RCA season in sixth place with a score of 72.50.

The 1970s saw a change in society. At the era of the Vietnam War, counter-culture and social upheaval had many corps finding it tough to recruit young people. As a result, many corps went inactive or folded.

The Grenadiers were also strained by this and a smaller than normal corps resulted. This led to a creative arrangement with the Belleville Yardmen from Belleville, ONT, a corps that had the same problem. During the 1975 and 1976 RCA seasons, the Kingston Grenadiers would be known as the Grenadier-Yardmen Drum & Bugle Corps.

The arrangement saw practices and rehearsals held in each city as a manner of being fair to all. For two seasons the arrangement was successful in that the Grenadier-Yardmen continued to compete.



Kingston Grenadiers, September 5, 1998, at DCA Prelims in Allentown, PA (photo by Harry Heidelberg from the collection of Drum Corps World).

a need for instruments. The Marching Debs All-Girl Drum & Bugle Corps from Picton, ONT, had just what was needed. Bugles and drums were for sale. Yet the new corps had limited financial resources.

Enter the good actions of one member's father, Bob Revell, who wanted to help. Seeing the value of the corps for both the members and the city, Revell took out a loan to make the instrument purchase possible.

Uniforms also were needed and it was decided all members would buy the same kind of pants and shirts and have the shirts dyed red. Hats were provided by corps member Rod Morey who secured cooks hats, donated by the local prison where he worked.

Kingston had a drum corps, but it now needed a name. The city of Kingston is

At the 1975 RCA Championships, the corps placed eighth, scoring a 60.00. At the 1976 RCA Championships, they placed seventh with a score of 71.85. But the times had caught up with them and 1976 would be the last season the corps would be able to operate for some time.

While the Grenadiers did not function from 1976 to 1979, a dedicated group of members worked to reorganize the corps. Under the guidance of Director Bob Peters and the board of directors, the corps worked to pay off outstanding debt, reacquire equipment, recruit and work to get the Grenadiers back together.

During 1979, while working on fund-raising, the members formed a parade corps to help pay off the bills. Because of the debt, the Grenadier name couldn't be used. Thus, for the purpose of doing parades to earn the money, the members took the name King's Regiment Drum Corps.

During the winter of 1979 and 1980, the King's Regiment performed in a number of parades and was successful in paying off the debt and regaining the name. Once more the members could call themselves the Grenadiers!

In the winter of 1980, the corps again took to the main street of Kingston, much like those members in 1961, performing in the city's Christmas parade and thrilling the crowd.

Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, the Grenadiers functioned as a parade and concert corps. In 1986, the corps was invited to perform at the John F. Kennedy "Massachusetts Citizen of the Year" awards, attended by members of the Kennedy family. In fact, attending the event were President Kennedy's children, Caroline and John Jr., as well as Sen. Edward Kennedy.



Kingston Grenadiers, September 1999 (photo by Harry Heidelmark from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Throughout this period, the Grenadiers were quite active. It was common during the weekends of the summer for the corps to perform in as many as three parades or concerts.

In the early 1990s, members once again had the desire to be a competitive corps. Under the guidance of Director Don Dean, the board of directors began work toward that goal. They improved the quality of musical instruction, sought out better musical arrangements, purchased new instruments and set about on an intense recruiting program.

This took the corps into the schools of Kingston and resulted in an influx of many talented young people to improve the overall quality of the corps.

Beginning in 1993, the Grenadiers' board of directors, along with a group of dedicated members, set out on a five-year plan to enter competition in DCA, but success came sooner.

In 1995, the plan came together and in July, at Belleville, ONT, the Kingston Grenadiers performed in their first DCA contest and scored a respectable 60.00. At

the 1995 DCA Championships in Scranton, PA, the Kingston Grenadiers gained associate member status with their 12th-place score of 74.00.

Since that first DCA season, the corps has continued to be a fixture in senior corps competition and, in 1998, the Grenadiers attained DCA full member status by placing ninth

with a score of 82.10.

Also, the Grenadiers were crowned Canadian Senior National Champions in 1998 and again in 1999.

As of 2002, the Grenadiers

have maintained their DCA member status while continuing to be Canada's only competing senior drum corps.

To assure a healthy future and that all-important influx of new members, the organization has established the Grenadiers School of Music. It offers young people musical instruction at no charge.

The instruction comes from members of the corps who gain valuable experience teaching. To date, the venture has proven successful with a number of the students of the School of Music making the jump to the Grenadiers.

Financial woes and changes in society couldn't dampen the enthusiasm of the dedicated members. Their feelings about the activity and for the corps have kept the Kingston Grenadiers a constant in the drum corps community.

If the past 40-plus years are any indication, then the future of drum and bugle corps in Kingston is assured. With their collective stated goal being to operate a corps that seeks to provide its members with a quality drum corps experience, coupled with the desire to produce entertaining performances, then it is most likely DCA will have at least one Canadian drum corps in its ranks for a long time -- the Kingston Grenadiers.

Rick Jutras began his drum corps experience in 1968, playing baritone bugle with the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps, St. Lawrence Drum and Bugle Corps. He has marched with the Kingston Grenadiers and was a member of the 1997 and 1998 DCA World Champion



Empire Statesmen.

His two greatest experiences in the drum and bugle corps activity have been being able to share the field with the love of his life, Christina Cardinal, and in 2001 with his son, Alex.

Since 1993, Jutras has served as a staff writer for Drum Corps World. His professional life is spent as an adult education teacher, engineering consultant and licensed millwright.



Kingston Grenadiers, 2000, at the DCA Championships in Syracuse, NY (photo by Alan Winslow from the collection of Drum Corps World).