


by Carol Hooton

The year was 1946. America's young warriors were wearily returning from both the European and Pacific Theatres of World War II. A small number of those returning veterans had been members of a

long-standing junior corps in Philadelphia before the war, the A.K. Street Post.

First, they welcomed each other home and then made plans to reorganize as a senior corps. The then-current members of A.K. Street Post junior corps were offered an option -- they could march with the veterans, but only for parades and exhibitions. (The VFW and American Legion competition rules, at the time, required documented age and veteran status for membership in a competing senior corps.)

Russ Murphy was the music arranger and bugle instructor.

Bob Cotter Sr. instructed and wrote for the percussion. They both awaited the return of the former A.K. Street junior corps drum major, William "Wild Bill" Hooton, to be their drum major and to write and instruct the drill.

Word soon spread of the "new" senior corps and age-outs from Osmond, Yearsley, Olney Legion, DAV, East Germantown and other Philadelphia junior corps migrated to the new senior corps.

The original A.K. Street Post senior corps was outfitted in khaki uniforms with white pith helmets. (*See top photo*). However, thoughts of a unique uniform were a top priority, whenever funds would become available.

It was the consensus that the dominance of the color black carried the message of strength, mystery and class.

The hat was the "coup de grace," exhibiting power and stature the likes of which no other drum corps had ever imagined. Reilly wore the black visor cap leveled two fingers above the nose.

This cap position required a slight backward tilt of the head for vision. This posture was admired and then duplicated nationwide as other corps copied the design.

Wearing of the cap has been duplicated and imitated many

Reilly Raiders



(Top) The Street Post senior corps, 1946; the Reilly Raiders in 1953 (photos from the collection of Carol Hooton); the 1960 Reilly Raiders at the "National Dream" contest in Jersey City, NJ, at Roosevelt Stadium (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World); at a 1958 show (photo from the collection of Carol Hooton).



times, but no other corps could ever capture the true essence.

Street Post did not want to be like everyone else and this uniform certainly would set them apart from all others.

The members then decided to honor a fallen comrade, Cpl. Frederick W. Reilly, by naming the new senior corps after him. When they adopted the Reilly name, the word *raider* was a natural and, well . . . the two words combined indicated to the drum corps world that there was a new force in town.

The name Reilly also implies an Irish connection, which resulted in the addition of "bits of the colour green, laddie" (in just the right places). With a Gaelic music theme to match, this molded it all together in one



The Reilly Raiders alumni corps, with conductor Larry Kerchner, at a concert in 2001 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World)

The Reilly Raiders, always known for their creativeness and "firsts," came up with a very unique fix. In 1949, they decided to paint all of their bugles green to match their brand-new uniforms. It turned out to be a three-fold solution. The automobile enamel was not only a colorful idea, but it also covered the pinholes, improving intonation.

The only polishing necessary was the inside of the bell. Many drum sticks were polished with A-1, once buglers found they were an excellent ramrod tool for the bell.

Reilly used these green bugles until the arrival of their new horns.

In 1948, the corps was invited to Webster Music Hall in New York City to make several recordings on the Palda record label. These would be the first professional recordings ever produced of a drum and bugle corps. There remain a few in existence to this day.

Reilly, a distinct underdog, was the winner of the very first National Dream contest at Jersey City, NJ's,

Roosevelt Stadium in 1949. It eventually had to be moved indoors to the armory because of inclement weather.

Competing against the national champions of the VFW, Lt. Norman Prince of Boston, MA, and the national champions of the American Legion, Jersey Joes of Riverside, NJ, the Reilly Raiders were crowned the Dream contest champions. This set the stage for their phenomenal winning record that was to follow.

Reilly won their first national championship in 1950, a sentinel accomplishment, from formation to the ultimate prize in only four years. Two years later, under the leadership of their Hall of Fame drum major, "Wild Bill" Hooton, they became the only senior corps in the United States to hold both the VFW and American Legion Championships. They eventually won seven national championships and 16 Pennsylvania state titles.

From 1946-1959, they entered 129 contests with a phenomenal record of 90 first places, 31 seconds and eight thirds. This enviable record, and their competition accomplishments, combined to catapult them to their highest honor, induction into the World Drum Corps Hall of Fame in 1981 as the senior corps of the 1950s.

Reilly lost many members in 1967 due to the war in Vietnam and ceased competing.

They were reborn as an alumni corps in 1994 and are going strong today.



Carol Hooton marched in her first parade as drum major at the age of seven. She studied trumpet for 17 years, including studying at the Eastman School for the Performing Arts.

She was a soprano soloist with the Henrietta Drum Corps and also performed with the Chili Crimson Cadets, Gates-Chili and the Crusaders as a glockenspiel player, drum major and color guard captain.

One of the first women to be certified to judge brass for the All-American Judges Association, she also wrote for Drum Corps News, Off the Line, the Chicago-based Drum Corps World, Eastern Review and Cadence Magazine.

She is currently the information systems chairperson for the World Drum Corps Hall of Fame.



(Above) Drum Major "Wild Bill" Hooton, 1995 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World); (below) the alumni corps at a 1999 concert in Harrisburg, PA (photo by Harry Heidelberg from the collection of Drum Corps World).



The Reilly Raiders, 1959, in Los Angeles, CA (photo from the collection of Carol Hooton).

complete package.

All this was not a one-person decision. Typical of Reilly, it became a democratic effort by all members and the rest, as they say, is history. It took a while before the uniform was accepted by veterans and non-veterans alike.

The corps eventually formed its own VFW post, Cpl. Frederick W. Reilly Post No. 7947, Reilly Raiders. The post home was at the corner of Fifth and Venango Streets in Philadelphia. The motto over the door read, "Through this door pass the best damn buglecorpsmen in the world."

During the war and for a short time thereafter, new bugles were not manufactured, as the factories formerly producing war effort materials had to retool for musical instruments. This required a year or two before new horns began to slowly trickle down. Meanwhile, the seniors had to use the same bugles that were manufactured in the 1930s and most were in pitiful condition at best.

Intonation was one of the major problems. The cause was air escaping from the many tiny pinholes appearing along the tubing. This was due to the thousands of polishings during the contests of the 1930s and early 1940s.

