

Independence Day, 1983

By Allen Lawless



Parade season in Berlin's summer had the distinction, in comparison with stateside bands, of cramming pretty much all the military ceremonies that needed to be played inside a three-month period. It meant lots of marching, lots of playing, and lots of pain. It meant listening to some colonel point out perceived faults, regardless how well the sequence was played, just to get the training time in. So the best way to handle the whole experience was to simply surrender to the pain, divorce your mind from the overall scheme and simply focus on the immediate moment. It was an exercise in anguish and how to deal with the physical discomforts sufficient to be solid and perform, yet keep something back for the inevitable, "Do it again, band!"

Eventually the duty day would end and it would be time to mentally come back to normal.

Independence Day was a day like no other day I'd ever worked. The day started with getting suited up in the Army green uniform. This included all regular uniform accoutrements, along with bloused spitshined boots, white dickey with the Berlin patch sewn to it at the throat, white pistol belt with an oversized brass buckle, and a gloss-black painted helmet liner with the Berlin patch decal on the sides of the helmet. Rounding out the ensemble was a pair of white gloves. Clarinet/flute/piccolo players had to cut off the fingers of the gloves to enable them to play.

Thus uniformed and wearing nothing but a T-shirt underneath the Army green coat, we grabbed our black leather music pouches and our instruments, boarded the bus and headed over to the 4-Ring. The 4-Ring was the GI-equivalent to the name the Berliners gave to a large, rectangular paved area located just to the east of McNair Barracks which they called "Platz des 4.ten Julis," a.k.a "4th of July Square". At about 1000 we'd disem-

bark and then final preparations would begin.

Already at that hour people were lining up to see one of the most ceremonial happenings in Berlin. The area around the 4-Ring was festooned with red, white, and blue bunting, American flags, pack howitzers adorned also in red, white, and blue, and an aura of expectation filled the air. Encircling the 4-Ring was McNair Barracks on one long side of the rectangle, a cemetery on the other long side, a major street (Goerzallee) on one short side, and a side street named Osteweg on the other short side. On the other side of Osteweg, Kolonie Schweizerland would be blooming in the summer air. This garden colony, one of many throughout Berlin, provided affluent Berliners who could afford it small plots of land which they could use for their gardening activities. Since Kolonie Schweizerland was in such close



proximity to McNair Barracks, the band occasionally played "platz" concerts there during the summer. This was seen as a bit of public relations work to strengthen the relationship between the Berliners and the American forces. Having played several platz concerts there and in other garden colonies, I can say with certainty that the band's efforts helped considerably.

After the band's drum major would dress and align the band, the band would march to its starting location to perform pre-ceremonial music. This location was generally just in front of the reviewing stand, which was in the center of the 4-Ring. We'd generally play 15 to 20 minutes of appropriate marches prior to the ceremony commencing. No troops were yet on the field.

Following pre-ceremonial music, the bandmaster would relinquish control of the band to the drum major, who would then march the band to its final position on the left flank of the entire formation, a distance of perhaps 300 meters away from the reviewing stand. Upon arrival at the final position, the band would receive a signal to march the troops on line and with that signal, the band would once again play marching music with a heavy bass drum beat on the left foot. The tempo might be a shade slower than the marches played during pre-ceremonial music to facilitate marching. Soon, the troops would begin appearing, marching out of their staging positions inside McNair Barracks and marching toward their final positions on the 4-Ring. This entire process might take as much as 30 minutes for all participating soldiers in the Berlin Brigade to arrive at their final positions.

Then the Adjutant of the ceremony, typically a junior officer, would command the formation to come to the position of Attention. In turn, each unit commander would command his/her unit to come to Attention. The Adjutant would then command

the band to play Adjutants Call, a standard bugle call with drums. Upon the first note of Adjutants Call, the Adjutant would then move out smartly to the center of the formation and await the presence of the Commander of Troops (COT) to appear. This “moving out smartly” thing was more like a scuttle, with the Adjutant practically running, sidearm flopping around in its holster, in an effort to make it to his point before the music stopped. (It never worked, though it never ceased to amaze me how much they would try, given the size of the formation.)

Once the Adjutant arrived at his spot and ascertained that the COT and his Staff was ready to take the field, the Adjutant would face about and command the unit commanders to bring their units to the position of Pres-

ent Arms. This was done in sequence. The COT and his Staff then took the field. Once in position, the Adjutant reported to the Commander of Troops, “Sir, the command is formed.” The Commander of Troops would command the Adjutant, “Take your post.” Upon doing so, the Staff would then maneuver such that the Staff would be physically behind the Commander of Troops if he faced about. The COT then commanded the unit commanders to bring their units to Order Arms and Parade Rest. This was done in sequence. The COT then commanded the band to Sound Off.

Usually before this command, in anticipation, the bandmaster and drum major would change position. The drum major would execute the Instruments Up command with the mace and, in tempo, command the band

to Sound Off. Three chords were played and the band would step off playing the correct march. At a suitable point, the drum major would execute the Left Turn with the mace and the band would execute that left turn and proceed down the line of troops.

The traditional

purpose of the Sound Off sequence was the opportunity for the band to honor the soldiers on the parade field.

This is where things got a little tricky. First of all, the Brigade Commander, Brigadier General Leroy Suddath, had wanted the band to march a special step while the band marched past the reviewing stand. This step, which we called the “Queen Anne Step”, was stolen from the British Army. The step is characterized by the right foot coming alongside the left foot, halting momentarily and in rhythm, then continuing on the rest of the step. The left foot would then repeat what the right foot had just done. This had the effect of lending a very martial, dignified air to the occasion and it was just the thing to make the Commanding General’s day.



This Queen Anne thing was not something taught at the School of Music. It was a special deal, cooked up by the CG and by God, we were going to do it. So we did. Some of us even did it without falling on our faces. Initially, it was very awkward but with enough training and sweat, not to mention a dropped instrument or two, it became easier.

We typically played Kenneth Alford's march "The Standard of St. George" at this juncture for a number of reasons. First, any Alford march was a good one. He was British, so that fit the occasion nicely. Second, the

you. Actually, if you're in the front rank (and I usually was, marching guide file more often than not), the onus was upon you and the drum major to get the countermarch right. After successful execution of the countermarch, the band continued to play while marching back down the line of troops and when it reached its spot, executed a right turn, another countermarch, halt, and if the drum major did his job properly, the band would wind up back where it began. Three final chords and then instruments down.

The Sound Off was unquestionably the toughest part of the ceremony to do. Marching and playing had to be spot-on because the band was being scrutinized by hundreds of pairs of eyes. Nobody wanted to be the one who screwed up, dropped their instrument or a drum stick, or tripped and fell.



first strain of the march was actually a very long fanfare and when we'd just about run out of gas from pumping that much air downrange, we'd launch into the Trio of the march which was the point we were to execute the Queen Anne step.

The Trio of the march was understated, melodic, and easy to memorize. Another good reason to play this particular one. And finally, the second strain within the Trio was the stepoff point to return to Quick Time from the Queen Anne. The effect was pretty impressive, I must say. Everybody executes in unison, while playing a fairly interesting march.

So at the end of the line of troops, the band executes this cute little maneuver called a Countermarch. There are several ways to do it, but the best way to do it is to do it without falling down or tripping the guy in front of

the bandsman to either side of you, plus the one in front of you, and if you're a brass player, doing all of this while playing at a triple fortissimo. It's physically and mentally demanding, hard work for everyone.

But you made it back to the starting point. The sweat is streaming and you're panting with exertion. But it's time to play again.

The COT commands the unit commanders to bring their units to Attention. Once this is done, again in sequence, the COT commands, "Officers and Colors, CENTER (with a pause here while some maneuvering goes on), MARCH!" With that, the band plays more marching music while the detachments bearing the National Colors and the Flags of the Fifty States move to their final positions in preparation for the actual ceremony. Once in position, the COT commands the detachments to halt

and as soon as the bandmaster sees this, he in turn signals a cut and instruments down.

Now it's time for the band to perform the National Anthem. But first, the COT commands the secondary unit commanders (the original ones are up front with the detachments) to bring their units to Present Arms. This is done in sequence.

Now the band plays the National Anthem. Appropriate honors are rendered by those military attending the ceremony without taking part in the actual sequence of events.

Following the National Anthem, the COT commands the secondary unit commanders to bring their units to Order Arms. This is done in sequence.

Next comes a long narration which highlights the purpose of the ceremony and the significance of the flags on the parade field. When each State in the Union is named in order of joining the Union and each territory is named, a round is fired from the pack howitzer battery, which is lined up not too terribly far from the band and pointed right at us. The cannons roar and each flag is dipped.

The howitzers are a problem. They're loud, they emit a lot of smoke, and no matter how hard you steel yourself, you can't quite keep from jumping when the first round goes off. This happened in a big way to SP4 Hyland Brooks, sax. He literally jumped a foot in the air.

Following this most impressive of ceremonies, the COT commands the troops to come to the position of Parade Rest. The bandmaster then rather surreptitiously instructs the band to bring Instruments Down. This means the musicians playing sousaphones, percussion, and trombones adopt a modified position of parade rest, which allows the instruments to be lowered gently to the ground during the upcoming speeches.

The Reviewing Officer (usually the US Commander, Berlin, a two-star general) then gives a short speech.

The speech over, it's now time for the officers and colors to return to their original positions. This is done in the reverse manner as going out. While this is going on, the musicians who have adopted the modified position of parade rest assume the "real" position of parade

rest. When everybody's aligned, it's time for the Pass in Review.

Prior to the command and in anticipation, the bandmaster and drum major exchange places in front of the band. Upon hearing the command, "Pass in Review," the unit to the right of the band gives an appropriate command for his unit to step off marching. The band also keys on this command. If everything goes well, everybody steps off at the same time with the same foot. If it doesn't go well, it's not the band's fault.

The band marches forward while playing and executes a left turn. Ideally, the unit next to the band follows the band. This doesn't always occur, however. While the band continues to march and play, the COT and his staff wheel into position in front of the band. When the COT and staff pass in front of the reviewing stand, the command, "Eyes Right" is given and hand salutes are rendered. The drum major also executes "Eyes Right" and renders the hand salute. With luck, the drum major won't careen toward the right when he does that, a situation that I've seen.

Once past the reviewing stand and down far enough that it's not a problem, the drum major signals the band to execute three left turns in quick succession, thus forming the infamous "box". The band winds up back up in front of the reviewing stand, with the troops marching past in front of the band. The bandmaster and drum major typically change places again. The band continues to play as the entire formation passes in review. When the final unit has passed (and it could be some time, depending how many troops are in the formation), the bandmaster and drum major exchange places a final time for the final piece.

An eight-bar drum cadence is signaled and following the cadence, the band begins playing "The Army Song" or "The Caisson Song". After the introduction, the band steps off in unison and executes a left turn at the direction of the drum major. Following the completion of the Army Song, the drum major signals a cut and to a drum tap till the band is halted and dismissed.

The time? Real close to 2 o'clock P.M. Total time spent on the field? A minimum of three hours. Tired? You bet. But the day has just begun, because now the band loads up the bus in a hurry and with Polizei and MP escort, blue bubbles spinning, the band heads off to the Har-



nack House for the USCOB's reception.

Upon arrival at the Harnack House (aka the Officer's Club), we offloaded our gear. A portion of the band, usually a combo or other small ensemble, would set up in an unobtrusive part of the outdoor setting where the reception was being held. The rest of the band went in the Harnack House (in the back door, of course) and eat reception-type food and drink lots of liquids. The combo would play while the invitees, all of them senior dignitaries and folks of that ilk, filtered in following the 4-Ring ceremony. After a while of background music, it was time for the full band to put on a short presentation, generally after some speeches. The combo would eat while the rest of the band performed. Following the Harnack House gig, the stage band would then pack up, change uniform to dress blues, and head to Checkpoint Charlie.

The ambassador to East Germany, whose residence was in East Berlin, also had requested band support for his own reception. In 1983 and 1984, the band honored that request and provided the stage band for the outdoor garden party that he hosted. The band set up, played, got some lunch, and headed back to Checkpoint Charlie

and eventually, Andrews for offloading of equipment and preparation for the final gig of the day – the concert and fireworks display. In 1983, this concert was performed at Wannsee. In subsequent years, the concert was performed at the Dreipfuhl Park, referred to as “The Duckpond” by the band.

The 1983 Wannsee concert was a spectacle not normally seen by the band in Berlin. Marketing and promotion for this concert was very good because there were literally

thousands of people who attended. The band, set up very close to the water's edge, played upbeat and popular music arrangements of the day. The main piece, indeed considered a “must do” piece was Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, arranged for wind symphony. This piece, written by Tchaikovsky to celebrate Russia's victory over Napoleon's forces in the early 19th century, featured cannon to augment the percussion in the final moments of the piece. While there was some controversy regarding the selection of this piece (keep in mind the Cold War against Soviet Russia was still very much a reality), Mr. Ratliff's decision to perform this piece stood.

The concert was a huge success and the fireworks display was awesome. Following this performance of about two hours, the band packed up the gear once again and headed back to Andrews. Blanket leave was scheduled for the band in the next day or so and there were many who needed a break.

With the conclusion of the Independence Day activities, the parade season was essentially over.