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## Marching to the Beat of Her Drum: A View into the Music Heritage of the Women's Army Corps

Jennifer Trotnow  
*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

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MARCHING TO THE BEAT OF HER DRUM:  
A VIEW INTO THE MUSIC HERITAGE OF THE  
WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS

by

Jennifer Trotnow

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Music

at

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August 2022

## ABSTRACT

### MARCHING TO THE BEAT OF HER DRUM: A VIEW INTO THE MUSIC HERITAGE OF THE WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS

by

Jennifer Trotnow

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2022  
Under the Supervision of Professor Dr. Sheila J. Feay-Shaw

The Women's Army Corps (WAC) Band was a unique military band that consisted of all-women soldier musicians. This study examined the stories and music education of the women who served in the WAC band. Several questions guided this study including: 1) what kind of music education did these women receive before, during, and after serving in the WAC band? 2) how were the music educations of these soldiers different throughout the various eras of war? 3) did the women continue to play their instruments after they finished serving in the Army? If so, in what capacity did they play? and 4) why do they continue to hold/attend reunions every other year? The research revealed common themes across the women veterans' lives including the desire for personal choice, changes in military protocol, women's rights, the importance of music, as well as the sisterhood that serving in the military together created.

To all military musicians,  
but especially the WAACs  
and WACs



Figure 1. WAC Bass Drums. (Source: Karen's personal collection).

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIT	Advanced Individual Training
ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Test
LMS	Ladies Must Swing
MEPS	Military Entrance Processing Station
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
SPARS	Semper Paratus Always Ready
WAAC	Women's Auxiliary Army Corps
WAC	Women's Army Corps
WAVES	Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Services

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have so much gratitude for all the amazing people that have helped me with this research project. First and foremost, I thank all the WAC band members who have graciously accepted me as an honorary member. Participating in the 2018 reunion was truly life-changing for me; I remember sitting there nestled in the trombone section playing next to women with so many years of musicianship and service to their country. I am truly honored.

Thank you to Karen for introducing me to this wonderful band and encouraging others to include me in the reunion; without you, I would not have known about this incredible group. Special thanks to Sylvia, Jan, Wally, Helen, Deb, and Kelly for taking the time to be interviewed, and sharing so much of your life experiences with me. Thank you to Blanche, Susie, Diane, Patty, Gail, Ann, Pauline, and Lori for answering the online structured questions, and providing me with even more insight on service and music education in the WAC band.

To the music faculty of UW-Milwaukee, thank you for your unending support and encouragement. To my committee members, Dr. Corley and Dr. Sterner Miller, thank you for your insight and reassurance. To Dr. Feay-Shaw, my deepest gratitude for your help from day one, when we initiated this research project in time for the reunion. You have helped me to dig deeper and pushed me to tell the story that needs telling. Your passion for research and your servant leadership inspires me.

Aside from the WAC band veterans, I want to thank those that I have served with, whether in my unit, the 132d Army Band, my Covid-19 testing team, or anyone from the various Army schools I have attended. My battle buddies have always inspired me to be a better soldier

and person, and I am thankful for them. A special thank you to my former First Sergeant, Deb, for introducing me to Ladies Must Swing, and subsequently, Karen.

Finally, to my friends and family, thank you for always being there for me throughout this project. Whether I needed words of encouragement, or someone with whom to bounce ideas, you were there when I needed you most.

“You’re welcome, but bear in mind  
we didn’t know we were leaving tracks  
at the time we were doing it.”  
-1SG Karen Syverson

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **The Music-Soldiers of the Women's Army Corps Band**

#### **Background**

As I was driving through the mountainous region of Tennessee in October of 2018, it dawned on me just how fortunate I was to be en route to Anniston, Alabama—home to the Women's Army Corps—where the veterans of the Women's Army Corps Band meet every other year for their reunion and concert. I was invited to sit in with the band as a guest musician based on my status as a member of the Army National Guard Band in Wisconsin; something only a handful of women can say they have done. Shortly after arriving, I was immersed in this phenomenon of the band by playing trombone alongside former first sergeants, as well as other former enlisted soldiers, and being led by a retired chief warrant officer—all strong women who had blazed a trail for those in my generation. Some of these women served together, while some were just meeting for the first time, but they all had one thing in common; they at some point had served as musician-soldiers in the Women's Army Corps.

#### **A Reunion of Unique Veterans**

The bands began in 1942 under the Women's Army Auxiliary Corp which became the Women's Army Corp, until 1978 when military service achieved full integration. Since 2004, members of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) have come together from all over the country to reunite and make music together. Before the band-specific reunions began, WAC soldiers of all units would gather biannually at Ft. McClellan, Alabama. Band members would find each other and hold their own get-togethers at the homes of soldiers who still lived near the base. When it was decided that no more WAC reunions would be held at Ft. McClellan in 1999, band

members realized that they still wanted to continue the tradition and formed their own WAC band reunion, starting in 2004.

The WAC band reunion has been held at Ft. McClellan, Alabama, every other year since 2004, except for 2020, when the COVID-19 global pandemic made gathering impossible. The next and final reunion will be held in October 2022. The leadership of the reunion has decided to make 2022 the final WAC band reunion due the increasing ages and number of losses of the musician soldiers.

The format of the reunion schedule has remained the same since 2004. On the first night of the reunion (a Tuesday), everyone gathers for what they call the “mixer.” The mixer is a chance for everyone to arrive, sign in and receive their reunion shirt and other goodies that the leadership of the reunion has put together. As the evening progresses, members who have agreed to play in the jazz band come together for a rehearsal and then anyone who would like to play is invited to join in a jam session. The next two days are rehearsals of the concert band with some additional time allotted for the jazz band to rehearse. The concert repertoire is 12-14 concert band pieces and 3 jazz band pieces, generally marches and other patriotic tunes, which are sent out to attendees months ahead of time. On the evening of the second full day, there is a dinner that anyone in attendance may join. Aside from celebrating being together, the women mourn their fellow soldiers who have passed away since the previous reunion and discuss future reunions. The next day is a lighter schedule of rehearsals, followed by the concert in the evening.

In 2018, as I was honored to sit in the midst of living music history with these women, the chapel which held the concert was at full capacity for the performance, and those attending

ranged from friends and family, WAC band members who could no longer play, WAC veterans from other units, current military members, and the public.

### **History of Women in the Military**

Any serious consideration of an official women's military corps was hardly possible before the twentieth century. Treadwell (1954) stated that before then, war was not mechanized and organized to the extent that required more manpower than a country could provide from its own population of men. Women had served as civilian nurses in wars previously but were never considered enlisted members of the military. In fact, in 1901, Congress established the Army Nurse Corps, but the nurses did not hold any rank, officer status, equal pay, or any Army benefits such as veteran's rights and retirement (USO, 2022). As the industrial revolution mechanized wars, it also helped women to work outside of the home and learn skills as clerks, telephone operators, typists, and technicians; all trades that were valuable to the military (Treadwell, 1954; USO, 2022).

Morden (1990) wrote that while the Army would not allow women to enlist during World War I, the Navy and Marines enlisted female Yeomen whose job revolved around clerical and administrative work. Almost 13,000 women enlisted as Yeomen and were granted the same status as men with the same uniform insignia (USO, 2022).

According to Treadwell (1954), following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, plans began forming to allow women to serve in the Army. On May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1942, the senate approved bill 77-554, establishing the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). The WAC would stand on its own until the integration of the armed services in 1978 (Bolzenius, 2021).

## **Research Questions**

As a soldier myself, I recognized that these women of the Women's Army Corps Band paved the way for me to be an Army musician as a female; something that was not possible before World War II. The story of these women, the choices they made, and the struggles they endured reveal a unique history of the Women's Army Corps Band which deserves to be captured and documented for future generations. Several research questions guided this study including: 1) what kind of music education did these women receive before, during, and after serving in the Women's Army Corp (WAC) band? 2) how were the music educations of these soldiers different throughout the various eras of war? 3) did the women continue to play their instruments after they finished serving in the Army? If so, in what capacity did they play? and 4) why do they continue to hold and attend these reunions every other year?

To answer my questions and to honor the service of these women, I examined literature surrounding the topic, interviewed former members of the Women's Army Corps band, and shared questions with the members planning to attend the upcoming reunion in October 2022.

Literature surrounding these questions was found in 4 main areas: histories of the Women's Army Corps band and other women's military bands, musical training in the Army and other military branches, history of the Women's Army Corps units other than bands and other women's military units, and the history of music education from pre-World War II to today.

## **Review of Literature**

Upon researching topics having to do with women's military service and specifically women's military service as instrumentalists, I reviewed the following main themes: the history



of women's military service; the beginnings of the Women's Army Corps Band; the role of women's musical performances; segregation; and issues of gender, equality, and suppression.

### ***The History of Women's Military Service***

According to Morden (1990), in early 1941, "Never!" was a typical reaction to the idea of women serving in the United States Army. The idea brought with it visions of women being on the front lines and attacking enemies, while it was still the cultural norm that a woman stayed home and raised her children. After the United States' involvement in World War II, however, that reaction changed. There was now a huge demand on labor with the United States' involvement in the war, and many women stepped in to fill the roles left by the men who went off to war. It was only natural that the next line of consideration revolved around women's involvement with the war itself. Questions arose such as: what could women do in the armed forces? Would they use weapons or be involved in combat? Treadwell (1954) wrote that to answer some of these questions and to help with the labor demands, Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers (R-MA) introduced a bill to establish the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1941. According to Morden (1990) Rogers proposed a quasi-military organization of 25,000 women to fill clerical jobs that the Army would otherwise give to enlisted men. The 77<sup>th</sup> Congress later established the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps with Public Law (PL) 77-554 on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1942, and on the following day, granted the Army permission to enlist 150,000 women between the ages of 21 and 45 as officers and enlisted soldiers for non-combatant duty (Morden, 1990). Within 6 months, the other military branches followed suit. The Navy had the WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Services), the Coast Guard had the SPARS

(from the motto, Semper Paratus Always Ready), and the Marines had the Marine Corps Women's Reserve (Morden, 1990).

### **Gaining Full Military Status.**

With the war still raging on in January of 1943, Morden (1990) wrote that Congresswoman Rogers and the WAAC Director Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby drafted a bill to make the WAAC a part of the army, instead of an auxiliary element. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the legislation into law, converting the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) into full Army status, thus removing the "Auxiliary" notation, and renaming it the Women's Army Corps. Along with this act came 5 Women's Army Corps (WAC) band units activated into service (Morden, 1990).

### **The Training of Women Soldiers.**

Once a woman decided to become a soldier, they were sent to a WAC training center, while their male counterparts attended basic training at their respective station. During World War II, five such centers existed: Fort Des Moines, Iowa; Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia; Daytona Beach, Florida; Fort Devens, Massachusetts; and Camp Ruston, Louisiana. As of *Victory in Europe Day* in May of 1945, the only two remaining WAC training centers at Fort Oglethorpe and Fort Des Moines closed. In February of 1946, the War Department started a program to retain the women still in the armed forces and on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed into law the Women's Armed Services Integration Act that allowed women status in the regular Army and Reserve components. The new WAC training center was opened at Camp Lee, Virginia in July of 1948, and then eventually relocated to Fort McClellan, Alabama in 1954 (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2. WAC Center Dedication, 1954. (Source: Karen's personal collection).*

Kerbey (2015) stated that the centers acted as a reception and processing center for the new women recruits. Basic Military Training at the WAC training centers varied between four to six weeks, where the mission was to transform a civilian woman into what Treadwell (1954) stated was a “physically fit, psychologically well-adjusted, well-disciplined soldier who was informed of the duties, responsibilities, and privileges of women in the Army” (p. 634). During this basic training phase, the women’s course looked similar to the first four weeks of the men’s course; there were topics taught such as military customs and courtesies, Army organization, Articles of War, and drill and ceremony. Instead of the 91 hours of combat courses required of the men, the women substituted 20 hours of reception and processing, current events, map reading, and personal responsibility.

### ***The Beginnings of the Women’s Army Corps Band***

According to Captain Rosenberry (1944), the (Army) music program “was predicated on a basic philosophy of morale building through soldier participation, emotional stability through self-entertainment, and a combat attitude through the use of music as a weapon” (p. 18). It was the aim of the program to realize this philosophy wherever the soldier was to be located.

After the basic training phase was completed, the women recruits went to their job-specific training, and graduates chosen to be in the bands reported directly to their unit to immediately begin on-the-job training. This path was unique to the band units as the women chosen were required to have musical training prior to joining the Army, and were selected by auditioning in their first week at basic training. Some women were recruited knowing that they were on track to be in one of the bands, while others were asked about experience after reaching basic training. The practice of requiring music skills upon enlisting in the army bands is still in place today.

Jones (2002) outlined that the Army WACs were the first group of women to attend the Naval School of Music in 1951. Only 5 WACs attended the school of music in the 1950s. Women did not return to the school, then, until 1973 when women were integrated into the previously all-male Army bands, and the Marine Corps and Navy opened up musician positions to women. Now titled the Armed Forces School of Music, this program is still located at the Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek in Norfolk, Virginia, and serves as the musical training ground for all branches of the military.

### **Motivation for Military Band Service.**

Sullivan (2017) speculated several reasons for women joining the Army band in the early years. She remarked that in the 1940s, the performance opportunities for middle class women instrumentalists were limited to community bands, all-female big bands, regional women's orchestras, and school bands. Some of these opportunities were paid gigs, but many were not. Joining the military band meant women were able to travel around the country and perform in

a professional setting while serving their country. Sullivan also reported that many of the World War II female Army band leaders were music teachers prior to serving.

### ***The Role of Women's Musical Performances***

Sullivan (2008) discussed that these women's military bands operated in the same fashion as the men's military bands, performing in parades, concerts, graduations, dances, and hospitals. While touring around the U.S., the presence of the band encouraged people to buy war bonds which served as their entrance ticket to the concerts held in the evenings. Sullivan stated that the women in these military bands were credited with helping to raise millions of dollars that provided money necessary to keep the war effort going.

Sullivan and Keck (2007) focused on another all-female non-military band that gave women a chance to perform professionally and tour around the country. The *Hormel Girls* was a group primarily staffed by acquiring rosters of female military bands from World War II, and asking the women to come play for the group when their military contract was up. According to Sullivan and Keck (2007), the Hormel Company started hiring the women in 1946 and the group lasted until December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1953. The requirements to become a Hormel Girl changed throughout the history of the group, but the most straightforward requirements were that the woman be a musician and unmarried. The group became an advertising success, and by the early 1950s, Sullivan and Keck (2007) stated that the women were making a salary of \$55.20 per week (along with a weekly food allowance of \$30 and laundry allowance of \$3), which was a good offer for young women at the time.

## ***Segregation***

Hersey and Sullivan (2009) made note of the racial divide found within the women's military bands. Not all branches of the service during World War II were accepting of African Americans. The Army did accept African American women into the WAC, but segregation was enforced. Army policy stated that there would be no discrimination in the types of duties to which African American women in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) were assigned, but band participation did not fall under this policy. The African American officers believed that their African American troops needed a band of their own and rallied to have an all-female African American band (USO, 2022). According to Hersey and Sullivan (2009), this idea came to fruition in September of 1943, and the 404<sup>th</sup> WAC band was formed. The WAC became the only branch of the military that allowed African American women to hold jobs as musicians. The WAC, however, was only allowed to recruit African Americans as 10.6% of the total force, as this was the proportion of African Americans in the United States at the time.

## ***Issues of Gender, Equality and Suppression***

The creation and first years of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and later Women's Army Corps (WAC) were a struggle in many ways. According to Treadwell (1954), from early 1943 to early 1944, there was a terrible slander campaign against the WAAC soldiers initiated by Army personnel and spread through the media. Because the War Department Bureau of Public Relations did not want any special attention drawn to the WAAC, instead of official documents showing how well the Corps was doing in its first year, the only news stories on WAAC life were limited to those which the news media secured. Often headlines that spoke of the WAAC were reporting accidents, suicides, murders, and family troubles that involved

members of the Corps. Treadwell (1954) wrote that many cartoonists drew attention to the WAAC, and focused on light humor, but with anatomical detail. The slander became more vicious as the push to move the WAAC into full Army status grew serious. There were accusations that the enlisted women's virtues were less than honorable and others that questioned why the Army even let women into the ranks to begin with. According to Treadwell (1954), the male-dominated military was being challenged to think that women could play a role in the military, and many pushed back against the ideas of women serving. Instead of having an open mind and realizing the valuable work women did on the home front, some chose to tarnish the reputation and honor of women ready and able to serve. Treadwell (1954) outlined that projects originated by the WAAC were frowned upon, recalling when the Director wanted to use the WAAC band on a radio program, but the bureau vetoed the idea on the grounds that "publicity is moving along very well and the orderly procedure of it should not be disturbed too often by special appearances" (p. 194).

### **Specific Challenges to Women Musicians.**

In 2016, the authors of the chapters in Sullivan's book described the barriers and hardships of not only women's military bands, but women's town bands, drum and bugle corps, school bands, and professional rock and jazz bands. The stories gave examples of women band members being objectified and abused. The stories of many of these women's bands remain unexamined across the history of their development. The opportunities that these ensembles provided for the women who served in them, has rarely, if ever, been the focus of research. This study provides a lens into the stories that some of these women have to tell.

## Summary

Throughout the history of the United States, women have wanted to help with the war efforts of their generations. While they could only assist as nurses or seamstresses in the period of the Revolutionary War through the Civil War, the tides began to shift as the world became more mechanized. World War I saw the first women become enlisted members of the Navy and Marines, and World War II saw the start of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, and eventually, the Women's Army Corps.

The veterans of the Women's Army Corps band were not only trailblazers of women serving in the military, but as women musicians as well. Through their efforts and bravery, they opened doors for women to be taken seriously in a now integrated Army. This background and history provided the framework for this qualitative research study into the background, military life and afterlife of members of the Women's Army Corps Band.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Methodology**

This study was developed through a qualitative approach, with aspects of historical research and oral history. The approach permitted research of literature surrounding the topic which created a historical lens as a basis from which to develop semi-structured interviews for former members of the Women's Army Corps band. The semi-structured interviews based on Fontana & Frey (1994) allowed for flexibility to follow changes that occurred over the years and eras of the women band members.

#### **Interview Techniques**

In order to capture a broad understanding of the research questions, a set of structured questions (Fontana & Frey, 1994) was sent to the women who had planned to attend the 2021 reunion which was then postponed to 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the advancing age of several of the women in the reunion group, alternatives to face-to-face interviewing needed to be put in place. The structured questions can be found in Figure 3. The structured questions were created online using Qualtrics and a link was made available to the veterans through their private Women's Army Band Facebook page. Eight veterans from the Vietnam era responded to the questions provided. Results were recorded and saved through Qualtrics. The veteran's names were recorded, but no other identifying information was collected.

- Interview Questions**
1. When did you enlist in the Army?
  2. How long did you serve?
  3. Why did you enlist?
  4. What role did music play in your decision to enlist?
  5. What instrument(s) do you play?
  6. How many WAC Band reunions have you attended?
  7. What was your music education prior to serving in the Army?
  8. What was your music education during and after serving in the Army?

*Figure 3. Interview Questions.*

Six women were individually interviewed based on their interest in the research project. Two of them were interviewed at the 2018 reunion, between rehearsals. Two were interviewed in their homes in 2021, and two were interviewed via Zoom. The interviews that happened at the reunion or in participants' respective homes were recorded with the voice memo app on my cell phone and notes were taken. The interviews that occurred via Zoom were recorded using the record audio and video option on the application itself. All the interviews were transcribed using the program Otter.ai, and each participant was sent a copy of their transcribed interview for verification of information provided. The amended transcripts are in Appendix A.

Data was coded using methods of open coding from Saldaña (2016) and analysis across participants based on Huberman & Miles (1994). Triangulation (Janesick, 1994) was facilitated through comparisons across the stories of the Women's Army Corp Band, and these specific

women soldiers. Interpretation of the results was developed with techniques from Denzin (1994).

## **Participants**

The participants of in-person interviews were chosen based on availability during the 2018 reunion. One interview candidate was recommended to me by another because she was the only World War II veteran present at the reunion. Another set of former soldiers would have been interviewed at the 2021 reunion however these interviews were, by necessity, done through phone or video calls, as well as a set of structured questions made available to those who planned to attend to gain data from a wider selection.

The following are the interview candidates recruited from the 2018 reunion:

**Sylvia** was a baritone player who served in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps from 1943-1946. She grew up in New Jersey and returned there after her service was completed. She passed away on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, at the age of 99.

**Jan** was a flute player who served in the Women's Army Corps band from 1954-1956. Aside from being a flutist, Jan was a life-long piano player and organist. She graduated from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and was once the co-owner of a music store. She was a mother of three and became a mathematician for GE Aircraft and a real estate broker. She passed away on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at the age of 86.

**Wally** is a trombone player who served in the Women's Army Corps band from 1958-1960. She resides in Minnesota with her children and grandchildren nearby.

**Helen** is a tuba player who served in the Women's Army Corps band from 1971-1974. Helen grew up in Florida and resides there again today. After her active-duty service, she went

on to serve with the Army Reserves and Army National Guard, for a combined total service of twenty years. Currently, she is a technical writer at the Air Force base near her home.

**Deb** is a French horn player who served in the Women's Army Corps Band from 1974-1977. She went on to serve in an active-duty unit overseas, as well as National Guard units. She currently lives in New York, where she helps to take care of her father.

**Kelly** is a flute player who attended Women's Army Corps basic training, and then served in the Fort Sheridan Army band from 1978-1988. She then went on to serve in Army reserve units in Ohio and Michigan. She resides in Battle Creek, Michigan, where she plays flute and piccolo with the local community band.

The participants in the online structured questions were: Blanche, a French horn player who ended up playing tuba in the WAC band; Susie, a trombone player; Diane, a woodwind player; Patty, a tuba player; Gail, a trumpet player; Ann, a percussion player; Pauline, a flute and piccolo player; and Lori, a euphonium player.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **The WAC is a Soldier, Too; Stories from 1943-1960**

Almost every soldier can remember the day that they raised their right hand and swore an oath to the United States of America, and these women of the Women's Army Corps Band are no different. The stories of these soldiers that are shared in this research take you through the enlistment of these women, the motivations they had for serving their country through the WAC, the musical background and education they had prior to enlistment, and what role music has played in their lives before, during, and after serving.

Their stories revealed the challenges these soldiers faced in both life and service throughout the different eras of war, and how the music education of enlisted women in the army bands changed throughout the years. These stories uncovered the reasons these soldiers continue to meet for reunions, and the strong bonds developed through serving in a unique mission.

The women in this chapter served from 1943-1960. Besides leading the way as women soldier-musicians, they also shared similarities in their home lives before enlisting; none of them chose the instrument they played, none could afford to go to school afterwards without veterans' benefits, and all 3 were looking for opportunities outside of their hometowns as they came into adulthood.

#### **Women's Auxiliary Army Corps Band in WWII: Sylvia's Story**

Sylvia joined the army on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1943, where she played the baritone horn in the first Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) Band. She served for 28 months, leaving the Army on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1946. When asked why she joined, "There was a notice in the paper that

said they need musicians, we'll supply the instruments. So I said, I'm going to join! But I was too young." Sylvia was 20, but at that time the age limit was 21 to join:

I was waiting until my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and praying that the war would be over so I didn't have to go because I was scared to death to go. I was never away from home before. At 20 at my time, a woman never left home until she got married. I was never out of the states of New York, New Jersey, or Pennsylvania until I joined the Army.

The army sent Sylvia to Daytona Beach, Florida for her WAAC basic training. She said of basic training, "It was a little scary at first, but then we got to be friends with each other, and it was interesting."

### ***The Promise of an Instrument***

Music did not come into Sylvia's life until high school. Her high school had newly implemented a band, something they did not have before her high school years. She desperately wanted to be a percussionist and play the drums in the new school band, but her director had other thoughts. The percussion section was full, but he needed more students in the low brass section. Sylvia was handed a baritone, and even though she wanted to play the drums, she was happy to just be in the band. She ended up enjoying the baritone very much and had the most fun playing at the high school's football games. Once high school was over, however, she had to return the school's baritone. Neither Sylvia or her parents could afford to buy a baritone, so when she saw the advertisement about joining the WAAC band and the promise of a free instrument, it seemed like the right thing to do.

Sylvia came from a family with military experience: "My father was a five-year army man, and he was very proud of me joining." Her mother was a little more cautious of her daughter joining: "My mother said to me, just be sure you want to go in because they don't let

you out until they are ready to let you out.” Like her father, Sylvia was very proud of her service to her county. Later in life, she even had personalized license plates that read “WW2 WAC.”



*Figure 4. Sylvia and her Baritone. (Source: Sylvia's personal collection).*

### ***After Enlistment***

After basic training in Daytona, Florida, Sylvia (see Figure 4) was sent right away to the band at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, New York, where she got to meet the other musicians. She remembers how the musicians were at all different levels: “The people in the military when I went in, some of them were professional musicians. They played in groups like Ina Ray Hutton’s All Girl Band.” The members of the WAAC band performed at going-away and coming-home ceremonies at the piers in New York. Going-away and coming-home ceremonies are still done by musician-soldiers today. In remembering her coming-home ceremonies:

We played for all the troops when they went overseas and when they came back again. We were stationed at Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn, and they transported us to New

York to the piers. It was a pretty rough feeling when they (the soldiers) were leaving, but when they came back, it was so joyful.

Sylvia remained in the band for 16 months but decided to switch jobs to become the chief fire clerk at Station Hospital in Camp Kilmer, located in central New Jersey. As for why she left the band, “there was too much politics in the band. And I was harassed by the trombone player. I don’t know. I just didn’t fit in there after a while, so I transferred.”

### ***Looking Back***

Sylvia attributes her time in the army to helping her through adulthood:

It made me grow up. I mean, I really grew up in the army. When I went in, there was very little I knew about outside life, but I learned real fast. We had all kinds of orientation courses. You had to learn and being with other people taught me a lot too. I really enjoyed learning about people.

In thinking about her choice to join the army versus staying a civilian: “there were plenty of jobs available then, I would’ve made out alright at home, but it would have been a dull life.” Even though Sylvia was nervous about her decision to join, the sense of adventure and the experiences she encountered overshadowed her fear.

After Sylvia left the WAAC, she went on to get married and had a daughter. She did not continue to play her instrument after serving but was excited to learn about the WAC Band reunions, none the less. Sylvia has attended all the WAC Band reunions since 2004. Even though she no longer plays her instrument, she comes to the reunions to share in the camaraderie with the other WAC Band veterans. When asked about her reasons for returning to the band reunions she said:

I come back for the people. They are wonderful, every one of them. I have never met a group of people like them. I mean, maybe it’s the camaraderie between musicians. I think that’s what it is, they are a great bunch.



Sylvia cannot travel alone anymore, so her cousin drove all the way from Washington State to pick her up in New Jersey to bring her to the reunion in Alabama in October 2018. At the reunions, Sylvia says she's treated like a celebrity. In reality, it's the women expressing their gratitude to her and the women of her generation for paving the way for women military musicians to exist and eventually become equal to their male counterparts.

### ***Summary***

Sylvia knew that she wanted to join the WAAC and play the baritone in the band. She felt nervous but also excited as she left home for the first time in her life. And while she did not stay in the band unit for her entire enlistment, it was the camaraderie of the band members that continued to bring her back to the reunions.

### **I Didn't Want to Be a Teacher, And I Didn't Want to Be a Nurse: Jan's Story**

September 2, 1945 was recognized as the official end of World War II, but peacetime did not last for long. On June 25, 1950, the North Korean People's Army invaded South Korea, sparking the first actions of the Cold War. In August of 1950, many Women's Army Corps officers and enlisted reservists volunteered to return to active duty, and eventually many more were recalled involuntarily by the Army. In 1951, Congress assumed the needed funds to establish a permanent training facility for the WAC soldiers at Fort McClellan, Alabama, and the center was dedicated in 1954.

### ***WAC Was in the Army Now***

While the women enlisted in the Women's Army Corps were now considered permanent, regular members of the Army, they still were left without their say on the matter of

many things. If the WAC leadership found out you could play an instrument, you got put into the band regardless of individuals' plans.

Jan enlisted in the army in August of 1954, and served for just over a year. Her reasons for joining were straightforward: "I grew up in a small town where your choices were marry some guy that works in a gas station and have a dozen kids." She continued:

You know, parents did not save for girls to go to college. And I wanted to go to college. My sister was working in the recruiting station. So she said, why don't you join the army? So, I went over and talked to him (the recruiter), and I decided that that was what I would do. Sounds like a good alternative. It got me out of town.

Jan was an excellent flute player and was offered a music scholarship at a local university, but decided against it because, "there were two things I knew I did not want to be when I grew up, always. I didn't want to be a teacher. And I didn't want to be a nurse." Jan's intention when enlisting was to join a signal corps or finance military occupational specialty (MOS), because she feared if she continued with music that she would end up teaching music, which was not what she wanted to do.

### ***If the Band Wanted You, That's Where You Went***

About 4-5 weeks into basic training, Jan found out that she had been requested to take an audition with the WAC band. The professor back home who offered her the college scholarship contacted the lieutenant at the WAC band to inform her that Jan was a flute player. Jan said of the incident, "The guy who offered me the scholarship called Lt. Painters. And because he knew her, you know, we all lived right in the little area. And the university was in the same area. And he just called and said, get her." When asked if she had any choice in being placed into the band, "I couldn't say no. Because if the band wanted you, that's where you went." She continued:

Then I heard the band. You know, I heard it just before that, and I heard it again, like, “I’m not good enough to play in that band.” Everybody who played in that band thought they weren’t good enough to play in it.

Jan (see Figure 5) later auditioned on flute and was sent to serve with the WAC band.



*Figure 5. Jan in Uniform. (Source: Jan's personal collection).*

### ***Jan's Music Education***

Jan learned to play the flute when her band director handed her a flute that he brought out of storage: “He said, ‘here’s a flute. Here’s a fingering chart. Blow on it like you do a pop bottle.’” She did not recall much of any music education prior to that point in high school, and her reason for wanting to play an instrument in the first place was because of a rule that majorettes had to perform on an instrument during the concert band season. Flute was what the band director had, so that is what she was given to play. In thinking of the flute, “I called it my Ford; fix or repair daily, because I fixed that flute for four years. It was always having things fall off.”

While enlisted, most of the education in music came from on-the-job experience playing with the other soldiers. Jan did recall a second lieutenant that gave the soldiers a class on music theory:

In that music theory class, there was this picture of the circle of fifths, and it was like somebody handed me the key to the kingdom. It answered all the questions! And I went, "this is so awesome" you know, because by that time, I had learned all the names of the chords I was playing, right. I couldn't read them, but I knew what key I was in, and I knew what chords I was playing. So the circle of fifths made it all make sense. And then there were other things which would have been the initial steps to learning to read music, although they didn't tell you the names of the notes, they did tell you the names of the lines and the spaces and the grand staff, and how it all fits together. So there was that kind of training, and I think we had that either a half hour or an hour a week.

### ***Life After the Army***

Jan got married and left the army all together after serving a little over a year. At that time, women who got married could leave the armed forces with an honorable discharge at any time. Once out of the army, Jan attended the Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati, and later took a job directing choir and playing pipe organ at a nearby Lutheran church. She remarked:

I got the job and I didn't know how to play it (organ). They hired me on the Sunday before Easter. The choir, that was a great choir, was supposed to perform the Hallelujah chorus on Easter Sunday morning. So, I go on Wednesday night to the choir rehearsal, and I looked at the choir director and I said, tell you what, I cannot play the bass pedals, but I can do the bass part in my left hand and play the rest. So that's what I did. And then that was when I went to Muncie, Indiana to learn how to play this.

Jan attended Ball State University, studying pipe organ and church music, while still working for the church.

Jan was also learning music theory and history by helping her husband at the time work through his music degree. She said:

You know, I wrote his thesis for him when he got his master's degree, and all of his classes, I would help him. So I knew all this stuff by that time. By the time he got his

degrees, I would know everything that he'd studied because I would grill him and like symphonies, I would stand at the record player and just play excerpts, and he would have to name what symphony it was, and I could do it by the time he got his degree.

Jan was also gigging around and playing piano with a nearby big band. She would get volunteered to play for things by her husband. She said:

In a way I thought it was mean because it was kind of terrifying. But it ended up to be a really wonderful thing for me. I don't know how to say 'I can't do it,' it goes against my internal organs to say 'I can't.' So would you say I'm a person who likes challenges?

Jan rose to the challenge of playing in many different circumstances, from playing flute in the WAC band, to organ in a church, and to piano in a big band. She also rose to the challenge of playing at the WAC band reunions.

### ***The Reunions: A Chance to Remember***

Jan has attended all 8 WAC band reunions that have taken place since 2004. A friend of hers who was also a WAC band veteran heard that a reunion was scheduled to take place in October 2004. She convinced Jan to make registration for lodging and attendance, and promptly received her registration form:

I got a registration form, and it said what instruments do you play? So I put flute, piccolo, keyboard, or pipe organ. And it said will you play for the concert? I said no, unless you have some need for dinner music or combo music, or something like that.

Jan then received a phone call from Karen, one of the WAC band members who played a crucial role in the reunions (see Figure 6). She would eventually get Jan to agree to playing more than she first anticipated: "So from agreeing to do a little dinner music, I ended up with the grip n' grin (first night jam session of the reunion), the dance band, the rock band, and the opener (of the concert band performance)."



Figure 6. Karen on Guitar. (Source: Karen's personal collection).

Jan and Karen then attended the reunions together. Karen sadly passed away in June of 2020 with Jan by her side. Jan said:

Karen had a theory, and I don't think particularly applied to me because it wasn't true of me, but many of them, she said, you know since they got out of the army, they've been wives, they've been mothers, they've been grandmothers, but they're not doing anything in their own right. And she said this is a chance to remember when they did do something in their own right and they can do it again. I think she was right, but I just enjoy seeing everybody and getting together and talking.

Jan kept music at the center of her life as something that she did both for herself and as a connection to others.

### **Never Raise Your Hand for Anything: Wally's Story**

Wally (whose name is actually Kathy but is known by Wally in the WAC band world) enlisted in 1958 and spent two years with the WAC band. When asked why she decided to enlist, Wally said, "I wanted to get away from my family and not have to take care of them until death." Wally was the oldest child of her family, so this was a concern of hers as a young adult.

Her intentions, however, were not to enlist as a band member, rather, “I wanted to be an MP (military police) but when we were all asked if anyone played an instrument, I raised my hand. Never raise your hand for anything.”

### ***Music Before and During Enlistment***

Wally took piano lessons as a child, but secretly stopped going to them before her mom found out. Her mom wanted her to take the lessons, but Wally just did not care for the teacher, and piano was not very interesting for her. When it came time for 7<sup>th</sup> grade, she could choose to learn an instrument in the school band. Her mom had told her she could play the clarinet, but the school band director had other ideas. He needed trombone players, so she came home that first day with a trombone in her hands. Wally continued to play throughout high school, so when she entered the army and the question was raised as to who had experience on an instrument, the truth and the trombone won out.

After basic training, Wally went right into the band. During her time in the band, the only music education she had was rehearsals and sectionals. There were no formal classes given for WAC musicians.

### ***Life After the WAC***

After her two years in the WAC band, Wally got out of the army and had a family. She attempted to join the National Guard when her children were a little older, but when she discovered she would have to sign release forms for the custody of her children in the circumstance of war, she decided against it. Being a single parent, there was no way that she would sign over custody of her children to their father to serve.

Wally (see Figure 7) did not participate much in music after serving in the WAC band, but still likes to come to the reunions when she can. She dusts off the trombone and starts working her skills back up when the music is sent out to the participants ahead of the reunions. For her, it is a way to reconnect with those with whom she served, and with whom she shares a common bond.



*Figure 7. 2018 Reunion Trombone Section with Wally, Front Right. (Own photo).*

## **Conclusion**

Through these stories, it is evident that women musician-soldiers shared some similar experiences before, during, and after their service. All three of the women in this chapter sought more opportunities than what their home lives and expectations would provide. Sylvia wanted to follow her father's tradition of serving, but also sought the adventure that serving in World War II would provide. Jan wanted to leave behind her hometown and what she saw as



poor prospects there. Wally feared being stuck in a life at home that led to taking care of her parents and younger siblings.

The three WAC band members interviewed were handed instruments by their band directors and were then self-taught or had very minimal training on their instruments. When they enlisted, they were told they would have to be in the band because they knew how to play an instrument rather than having the options that others had for developing new skills.

None of the three women interviewed here extended their military contracts past their initial enlistments. While Sylvia and Wally served their full contract, Jan decided to get married and left the military after a little over a year of service. Sylvia and Wally got married shortly after getting out of the military.

While personal choice of instrument and job selection became more of the standard in the years to come, many WAC band members joined in the hopes of benefits and job opportunities.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Are You a Girl with a Star-Spangled Heart? Stories from Vietnam and After**

The majority of women attending the current Women's Army Corps (WAC) band reunions are veterans of the Vietnam War era. While the war effort of this era had a much different public opinion than that of the previous two war eras, the WAC band veterans each had their reasons for serving. To capture more voices and enhance the interview data, 8 WAC band veterans from the Vietnam War era were sent structured questions to answer about their service. This approach was chosen for these women because in-person interviews were not able to be obtained due to time constraints. The women were able to complete the questions at their leisure. This group of participants included a variety of instrumentation which helped broaden the scope of this study.

#### **Music Set the Path for the Future**

In the answers to the structured questions of the eight WAC band veterans from the Vietnam War era, 6 listed music as their driving force for enlisting. Anne, for example, wanted to get paid to play music. Gail wanted to be a trumpet player in an all-woman Army band and get the GI Bill which would pay for a college program. Lori specifically wanted to be in the WAC band after learning about it from a classmate at college. Pauline had been told by conservatories that pursuing a degree in music performance would be a hard field to get into as a woman at the time, and they recommended she look at joining the WAC band. Pauline mentioned that music was not a huge reason for enlisting at first but became the reason she stayed in the service for 29 years. Her other reasons for joining were to follow her father's footsteps of serving in the military and joining her friend in Vietnam. Of the two that did not

plan on enlisting as band members, one wanted to pursue communications and the other wanted training as a medic, but at the time, as in previous years, any woman who enlisted that mentioned they had music experience had to audition for the band.

Of the 8 veterans, all had instrumental musical training at the high school level, except for Blanche. She taught herself to play French Horn and was a sophomore in college seeking a music degree when she enlisted. Lori had studied music education for 3 years at Ohio University before entering the ranks of the WAC band.

All 8 participants would go on to complete some level of college experience in music after leaving the army, even Susie and Patty who did not intend on becoming band members. Susie went on to receive her bachelor's degree in music education and then a Master of Music in trombone performance.

### ***Summary***

This group, who shared their experiences, spent slightly less than 2 years, all the way up to 29 years in service in the Army, and all have attended at least one of the WAC band reunions. There were similar themes from these women who served during the Vietnam era to the earlier soldiers. Six of the eight women from the structured questions continued their military service past their initial contract. In comparison, the three women from the earlier eras only served their initial contract and were discharged. In the following section of interviews, similar to the women who submitted details through the structured questions, the women joined the Army seeking a way to pay for college, a chance to continue playing their instruments, and stayed in the Army longer than their initial enlistment contract.

## **A Time of Change in WAC and Beyond**

Three women from the Vietnam era were interviewed one-on-one for this research. They are listed in order of their enlistment date. Helen entered in the summer of 1971; Deb enlisted in December of 1974; and Kelly enlisted in 1978. Each has a special story of how they came to be in the Women's Army Corps band, and how music impacted their life.

### **Persistence Pays Off: Helen's Story**

Helen auditioned for the WAC band in the summer of 1971, when the band was performing in Daytona, Florida for the Firecracker 400 race. According to Morden (1990), at that time, soldiers needed to pass an audition before enlisting if they knew they wanted their Army job to be with the band. She passed the audition, which was administered from the Watkins-Farnum Performance Scale book. The Watkins-Farnum book contains a series of musical scale exercises and short pieces for the instrumentalists to sight-read and has often been used by music directors at middle and high school levels for try-outs, seating placements, sight-reading tests, and year-to-year progress. Helen played scales and sight-read some exercises from the book for her audition.

While Helen passed the audition, she was initially turned down for enlistment because of her double vision. She recalled:

All the men were being sent to Vietnam with double vision, but women could not be considered for a waiver. So I was very, very fortunate that the fellow that I was taking lessons with, his wife was very involved in the National Organization for Women, and Roxcy Bolton was the president at the time. She is the same lady that's famous for getting our hurricanes named after men as well as women. She definitely went to bat for me, and she had some contact in Washington, DC, and a contact with the Associated Press, so there's this big press thing that went on. So on September 9<sup>th</sup> of '71, I was finally allowed in and that law was changed.

Helen's reasons for joining the WAC Band revolved around having enough money for school:

That's what got me through college because my parents couldn't afford to send me, you know. My father basically said that when I graduated high school, I would have to leave the house. So that's when I decided I was going to well, actually, I wanted to join the Navy, but then I found out that the only band a woman could go into was the Women's Army Corps band at the time.

Helen's persistence paid off. Because of her, a law was changed so that other women with double vision could also join the Army. She was able to enlist and earn the benefits that would pay for her schooling.

### ***Music Before the Army***

Helen came from a strong junior high and high school band program prior to enlisting: "Then it was called junior high, which was 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade with Mr. Sutton, and he was an excellent teacher, and I felt very qualified at that point to go into the Hialeah High band." Before 7<sup>th</sup> grade, she attended Catholic school, where the primary focus of music education was singing hymns.

Helen played tuba in the band and string bass in the orchestra at her high school. When thinking of her high school experiences, she stated:

We had a tremendous band director who every year would have a clinic four days long, where all the band kids got out of regular school, and we just did the band clinic. We had composers come down; Clifton Williams, Alfred Reed, Paul Yoder, and different years, different composers of that caliber came down. And then we would put on this huge concert, and it was a big fundraiser. And of course there was the usual marching thing too, but music education at Hialeah High School was really top, top notch for a high school setting.

Even with a very strong program, Helen fought through some barriers as a young woman:

The theory classes when I was in high school were all male. I remember wanting to get into theory and they wouldn't let me go into theory, into the music classes. And my high school band director, as great as he was, wouldn't let me play tuba marching. He said, euphonium or nothing. So then my senior year, I said, I'm playing tuba this year, and I got pretty insistent, so he let me play tuba.

Despite having a very strong band and orchestra program at her high school, Helen had to fight to take part in the music making and learning that was important to her.

### ***Music and Tubas in the WAC***

When asked what role music played in her decision to enlist, Helen said, "It was my world. It was my everything. I mean, I could not talk about anything else in life, except for music and tubas."

After enlisting, Helen attended WAC basic training, which was very different from basic training she would attend in the future: "Well, the WAC training was all women. We did some nice little exercises and a lot of class work. We learned how to apply makeup and all of that business." The makeup application would serve her in the public element of her enlistment. After basic training, she went right to work with the WAC band: "I really, really wanted to go to the school of music, but at the time that I entered, women weren't going to the school of music, it was strictly OJT (on the job training)." This was like what she faced in high school, where she was not permitted to take the music theory courses that she wished to take because she was female. While in the WAC band, "they started having night classes, and I can't say that it was top line education, but it was really exposure to things like music history. So they did have some classes while we were there."

Helen initially enlisted for a 3-year contract, "but they were doing early outs because we were winding down the Vietnam War. So I got out three months early, and went on to college,

and I joined the local National Guard as a repair parts specialist,” where she was the first woman in that unit. She debated between moving closer to home in Miami and joining the 13th Army band that is stationed there or going to the University of Florida in Gainesville. She chose to go to the University of Florida, which is why she joined the National Guard unit in nearby Starke, Florida.

### ***Girl in the Tuba Section***

After Helen finished her initial contract, she attended a community college where she took some music classes, and then applied to a music program at a local university, but unfortunately was not accepted:

After all, who wants a girl in their tuba section. I don't know if that was part of it or not, I'll just leave it. When I allow myself to think about it, what responsibility did I play in that decision, and what was just plain prejudice? And I can't take 50% blame for it, I just can't.

She recalled her feelings as a female veteran going into college:

One of the good things that happens now with colleges is incoming freshman have orientation or acclimation classes like that, and I think that is the best thing. When I was at the community college, because I was an older student, and because I have a very high reading comprehension, I was diagnosed as not needing any sort of help with acclimation. And you know, especially with veterans, because you come from a different life when you served a certain number of years active (duty), it would have helped to have met other veterans. It would have been nice to have met other female veterans, and I wouldn't have been on such an island by myself.

It's not a surprise that Helen felt alone at her new campus. She had just come from a very tight-knit group. The WAC band was full of camaraderie and now she was at a new place with new people who did not share the same experiences that she had before coming there.

Helen took some time away from military service after her enlistment as a parts specialist. She remarked: “After that I got out (of the National Guard), it was more than five

years, so when I decided to go back, I had to go through basic (training) again.” Since basic training was not specifically focused on preparations for the WAC band, things were a little different the second time around:

I guess the good part about it is that I was officially taught how to shoot an M16. There was a stronger emphasis on running and all that, so it was difficult. It was very difficult, but somehow, I made it through, and I was a journalist at that time. I had my BA (Bachelor of Arts degree) by that time, and I really learned how to write when I was in the Army.

Helen would go on to serve in the Washington, D.C. National Guard band before eventually retiring from the Army Reserves and is currently working on an air base as a technical writer.

### ***The WAC Band Reunion Sisters***

Helen has been to all but one of the WAC band reunions. When asked why she attends the reunions, she explained:

It’s seeing certain people, especially my tuba buddy, and knowing people as a comrade, a sister, rather than Sergeant Jensen, or you know, the rank is stripped. It’s just person to person, and that’s very neat. Some of the folks that were in the same time as I was, they’ve gotten their PhDs or they’ve done wonderful things in life, and I cheer on my sisters, you know?

It seems that the reunions offer Helen a chance to reflect on the changes in other people’s lives and the paths taken that deserve to be celebrated. She also said:

Another advantage to these reunions is that I get to know people’s heart and be able to put things more in perspective. Back in the day, I wouldn’t give two cents for some people, but now that I’ve gotten to know them through these reunions, I admire them, and I respect them. They all had their own challenges, and I’m just so happy for the reunions and to reach that piece.



The reunions provide a different type of setting through which these women have an opportunity to share who they are and what they think about a variety of topics beyond life in the Army and the WAC Band.

### ***Summary***

Helen persisted not only with her band director in high school to be allowed to march with her tuba, but with the lawmakers who decided to eventually let her in to the Army, despite her double vision. She also persisted through the challenges of going from active duty into college as a female and found her path through serving in both band and non-band units in the military.

### **So I Did the Same Thing: Deb's Story**

Deb enlisted in December of 1974, when she was still a senior in high school, through a program called the Delayed Entry Program (which still exists today) where you can enlist and wait to finish civilian education before attending Army basic training or advanced training. Deb had first gotten the idea of joining through listening to an army band that came to her school to perform:

It was the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Band from Fort Stewart, Georgia that was on a recruiting mission, and a very clever band they were. The recruiters said, "we know that not everybody is interested in joining the band, but some of you may be interested in carrying on and going to college and might like to have an audition and see what an audition is like or to see if the army would accept you, whether you want to or not, play an audition." And so my sister was interested, and I was not. My twin sister knew she wanted to play the saxophone and she was going to college, and I knew I was going to college, but Army band, no, not interested. So she auditioned and they said "yeah, we'd take you," but she said, "well, no thank you." But the recruiters got her name and phone number and they were very nice, and they kept encouraging her to just come down and talk to them with no obligation, and well, within a few weeks, they talked her into signing up, you know, she would be making money for college, and she could play her saxophone which she loved to do. So that's what she did. As a family, we were shocked-

we were floored. But within a few weeks, I thought, you know, that's not such a bad idea, so I did the same thing.

Deb then took an audition and passed.

Before Deb shipped out to basic training at Fort McClellan, she received a phone call from a recruiter:

When I first signed up, they asked "what band would you be interested in?" And I thought, well, and I asked what ones are in the Northeast. And so I was interested in going to Massachusetts, and everything was signed and sealed, but then the recruiter called me and said, "actually, we need to let you know that the Women's Army Corps Band is looking for a French horn player, and they are supposed to get first dibs for any woman coming in as a military musician."

Deb had already signed the paperwork that guaranteed her spot with the Massachusetts band, "I thought, well, if they (Women's Army Corps Band) want me, I guess I'll go. And I didn't know anything about the Women's Army Corps yet."

### ***Changes Were Coming***

Deb was unique in that she was the first woman to go straight to Advanced Individual Training (AIT), in this case, the Army School of Music, after basic training. She said:

I was the first one in the Women's Army Corps band to go to AIT out of basic training. It had been before that, that you finish up your basic training and you go to the other side of the post where the band is, and no AIT because you had to play up to a certain level to be accepted, and it was just never the thing for their members to go to AIT. So, while I was in basic training, I kept getting different messages sent down through the channels saying yes, you will be going to AIT; no, you won't; yes, you will; no you won't. And finally, they said yes, you are going to AIT. So, I was the first one. And I was the only one because I was the last women in the band before we got our first male member. I arrived on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976, and Bob came in March. So, I was right there at the transition time.

Deb entered Advanced Individual Training (AIT) in September of 1975, and at the time it was six months long, but Deb did not need to stay the whole time:

I didn't stay there six months, and my sister didn't either. She was able to pass out of a lot of the theory because she had taken music theory classes in high school, but I hadn't. I stayed at the school of music until our Christmas leave time, but the school was getting full. This was because they had cranked up their Army band recruiting, because we were getting ready to celebrate the bicentennial. And whatever they were doing worked, because we were just busting at the seams at the school, and there weren't enough slots for all the students that were going to be coming in after Christmas. And so those of us who had played well enough for our incoming auditions, they said, you are free to be passed out of the school to be sent on your way, or you can stay and finish your schooling if you want to, and I thought, no, I'm out of here. I'm ready.

Deb would serve 3 years in the WAC band before attending college for music education.

Both she and her sister served in the Army reserve band in Rochester, New York while going to school: "But as the time for college graduation was coming closer, I realized, well, I would like to teach, but I'm still enjoying playing more than teaching right now. And so I did." Deb went on to active duty and was stationed with the first actual duty assignment SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) band in Mons, Belgium, which consisted of band members from NATO countries.

### ***Music Before the WAC***

Deb's music education prior to being enlisted consisted of being in the kids' choir at her church up until 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and then playing the French horn in her high school band. She remembers wanting to quit playing at an early age:

As a beginning French horn player, I was very disappointed with how I sounded all the time, and I said, "oh, I'm not making any progress and it sounds so bad. It's horrible." I told my mom I wanted to stop. But my mom was so smart. She said, "Deborah, if you stick with it, you're not going to regret it, and when I was in school, my very best friends were in the band. You're gonna love it. It's hard to begin with, but you stick with it, and it'll be fine." And she was right. Without her encouragement, there's no way I could've done it. And I know that not all students have parents like that. They say, "Oh, you want to quit? Ok, go ahead."

When asked about her early music education she said:

I did have some jazz experience during my high school years. It wasn't with a teacher, but there was a small group that was put together by a young man in the area, and the group was called Saints and Sinners, and we played a bunch of Dixieland and easy jazz pieces.

One trombonist from that group went on to play with the Empire Brass Quintet. Deb continued:

“So that wasn't an education. It wasn't an education with a teacher, not a class or individual instruction, but it was just learning- learning to play.” She felt the same about her music education with the army bands: “Just being embedded with different groups, you know, playing with different orchestras, I learned a lot playing with the SHAPE band.”

### ***Life After Serving***

Currently, Deb does not play French horn in any groups, but she does sing with her church choir and with a community chorale. The chorale is run by a nearby college, and the instructor is always the current year's doctoral student from Eastman college's choral conducting program.

Deb has attended all the WAC band reunions since they began. She first attended a Women's Army Corps reunion in 1996 that was specially honoring the band:

I found out at that reunion too, that the usual plan was whenever there was a Women's Army Corps reunion, that the band folks would get together and usually just hang out at Dixie's (first sergeant) house for the time, and then they made the actual formal band reunions right after that. That started I think primarily because they stopped having Women's Army Corps reunions at Fort McClellan because they had closed up shop and it was no longer the WAC center and the Women's Army Corps Museum had moved to the DC area.

When asked what her favorite part of the reunions are, “It's just seeing people that I know and meeting new people, well, like you.” For all these women, the chance to reconnect with women who have had similar experiences appears to be a major draw to the reunions.

## **Summary**

While Helen and Deb had more in-depth music education prior to serving in the WAC band, both were forced to be specifically in the WAC band due to rules established long before their enlistment. Helen wanted to be in the Navy, but at the time of her enlistment, her only choice of military band would be the Army, and Deb wanted to serve closer to home, but if the WAC band needed the personnel, they got first pick of women musician-soldiers. These ideas, while similar to those of the women in the earlier era, reveal some small changes in practice.

### **I'm Not Going to be a Cook, and I'm Not Going to be a Grunt: Kelly's Story**

Kelly enlisted on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1978, and like Deb, utilized the delayed entry program, but only to delay her training a few months. She had just graduated high school eight weeks prior and prepared to enter basic training on September 5<sup>th</sup> of that year.

Kelly found out about the Army in a slightly different manner than the rest of the interviewees. She said:

A guy who was supposed to take me to the prom ended up leaving for boot camp, so his recruiter came and talked to me about joining the Army, and how I could be with Jim. And I thought, if he was going to be a grunt, I was going to go into the band!

Kelly had also considered taking an Army job focused on computers, but ultimately decided upon the band: "Well, once the recruiter offered it, that was it - the band or computers or I'm not going. I'm not going to be a cook and I'm not going to go be a grunt."

Kelly started playing the flute in her middle school band in Michigan and loved it so much she continued into high school, where she eventually got a private lesson teacher. In these private lessons, Kelly learned some music theory, but as she said, "nothing like what I learned at the (Army) School of Music."

### ***One of the Last WACs***

After Kelly passed her music audition, she shipped off to the Women's Army Corps basic training at Fort McClellan, where she learned that she was a part of the final all-female cycle (group of people training together) to go through basic training there. She said, "that was it, everything integrated after our cycle." At her basic training graduation ceremony, Major General Mary E. Clarke received her promotion to that rank, being the first woman to ever obtain it. Major General Clarke served in the Army for 36 years, retired in 1981, and went on to hold a position on the Women in the Services Defense Advisory Committee.

At this time in 1978, musician-soldiers entered the Army in the rank of Private First Class (PFC), which is the third level up in rank after Private and Private Second Class. Musician soldiers were given a slight bump in rank, because of their civilian-acquired skills, from those just entering the Army. Kelly said that "once you came through the school of music, you were given the rank of Specialist (SPC)" which is the rank following PFC. Basic training for Kelly was 10 weeks long, and she immediately went through to AIT at the Army School of Music in Little Creek, Virginia. AIT for military musicians is still held in this location today. Kelly spent 6 months at the school and received her SPC rank when she completed the training.

Kelly was assigned to the now fully integrated band in Fort Sheridan, Illinois, and reported there after AIT. The band at Fort Sheridan hosted professors from Northwestern University on Wednesday nights from which the members could learn music theory and take private lessons. As Kelly mentioned:

We were the only active-duty Army band that had college day as part of our duty. They made it mandatory. You were going to take private lessons, and then we had

classes like arranging and theory, and brass technique. That kept the music education going which was great.

Kelly left the Fort Sheridan Band in 1988 and moved to an Army Reserve unit in the Cincinnati area, where she was the first flute player there in over 10 years, so “they loved having Stars and Stripes actually played by piccolo instead of the trombones whistling the solo. Can you imagine?” After a car accident, she moved back to Michigan to be closer to family and the Veteran’s Administration Hospital for healing and joined the reserve unit there. In 1993 she started school at Western Michigan University but chose not to pursue music as she initially intended: “I had to change majors because of the flute professor that said that she didn’t understand how I had enough talent to be in the army band, because I didn’t have enough talent there.” After that, she spoke with another professor:

It was the black history professor that caught me after the flute professor had told me that (she didn’t understand how she had enough talent) and he said, ‘you know, this school wouldn’t give Luther Vandross a music degree either, and it didn’t stop him. You may not be doing it right now, you may have to kind of meet with a mold right now, but you pursue what you need to pursue. Stay you.’

Kelly went on to say: “and what are you going to do when you’ve used up almost all of your government funds for school?” Kelly went on to get an internship with the local VA hospital in recreational therapy, where she found her love of music as therapy. Her goal was to find a career in music therapy, but instead got into housekeeping with the VA.

### ***Kelly’s Music Today***

Kelly now plays flute and piccolo in the Cereal City Concert Band in Battle Creek, Michigan, aptly named for the cereal giant Kellogg’s that was founded there and who’s headquarters remain there. She is also looking forward to helping the local middle school band by providing woodwind lessons to the students.

Kelly has wanted to attend a WAC band reunion since she first heard of their existence but has not been able to for various reasons. She keeps in touch with everyone on the group's Facebook page and hopes to attend the reunion in 2022. Even though Kelly was never in a WAC band, she went through WAC basic training, and would later be stationed with soldiers from the WAC bands after integration. One of Kelly's First Sergeants at Fort Sheridan was a WAC band First Sergeant, and still acts as the First Sergeant for the reunions, by gathering everyone's information and working on all the logistics to make the reunion successful.

For Kelly, the importance of staying in touch is all about the solidarity and shared encounters with the women bandsmen. In 2017, a fellow veteran posted about an antique flute that she was no longer playing and hoped to find it a new home. Kelly, being a flute player, was quick to jump at the opportunity. The veteran did not want anything for it- just to see that it went into the hands of someone who appreciated it. When Kelly opened the package shipped to her from California, she found a Civil War era flute. As Kelly put it, "she did not know me and I did not know her, but we have that camaraderie and those shared experiences (of serving)."

### **Summary**

All three of the musician-soldiers interviewed from this era chose to serve beyond their initial enlistment. In fact, between their active-duty service and later reserve component service (Army Reserve or Army National Guard) for all three, they are all considered retired and able to draw a pension. The pre-Vietnam veterans in comparison served much shorter terms and did not enlist in any reserve component. Helen, Kelly, and Deb went through high school programs that encouraged private lessons on their instruments, and they were allowed to choose what they wished to play. They were not simply handed an instrument like their earlier



counterparts. Although Helen faced push-back when wanting to march with her tuba, she was still able to play it in the concert band, and eventually fought for her right to march with it.

While Kelly and Deb stayed as musicians through their Army careers, Helen chose to change her military occupational specialty (MOS) from musician to repair parts specialist, back to musician, and then to technical writing.

Between the three Vietnam-era veterans, there was a progression of Army music training. While Helen could not attend Advanced Individual Training (AIT) at the Armed Forces School of Music, Deb was the first woman from the WAC band to go straight through basic to AIT, and Kelly attended the much-longer 6-month course at the school. While the earlier veterans wanted more to escape home life and ended up being in the band by default, these three women knew what music meant to them, and saw the benefits that being a musician-soldier could provide.

While Kelly has yet to attend a reunion, Deb and Helen attend to see faces, both familiar and unfamiliar. Deb likes to connect with those she has known and meet new people along the way. Helen likes to catch up and cheer on those who she served with in a true esprit de corps.

## CHAPTER 5

### Analysis

When I learned in 2018 about the existence of a Women's Army Corps, I had already been serving in the Army National Guard for 5 years. While never considering myself a history expert, I had spent quite a bit of time reading about World War II. My grandfather had served in WWII with the Navy as a First-Class Electrician's Mate, and I remember looking through all his photo albums and reading as much as I could find about the ship to which he was assigned, the USS Indiana. I knew that women had served in some capacity in WWII and afterwards, but I wondered how I had never heard of the Women's Army Corps through my years of school or with the Army. Realizing that this special group of soldiers had paved the way for me to serve both as a musician and as a female, I set out to discover more about them and their journey of military service. The women who became part of this research study willingly shared their hopes and their stories of service to this country through the Women's Army Corps band.

In performing the interviews and structured questions with the women veterans, it was important to understand what kind of musical education each woman had before, during, and after serving, how music may have influenced their decision for enlisting, and what purpose the WAC band reunions served for them in the years after active service. While these initial research questions formed the basis for the investigation, these women told stories that revealed far more than the answers to these questions. Several themes emerged in the stories that these women shared which reveal connections to larger social issues of their times, changes to women's rights within and outside of the military, and the unifying power of music.

## Personal Choice

Historically, women have had to fight for many of the rights that they attained. Interviews of this group of women revealed the themes of personal choice and how that changed or remained the same for the women throughout the decades, as an important consideration. The three women who served in the WAC band prior to the Vietnam War did not even get to choose the instrument they wanted to play as middle and high school students; they were simply handed instruments by their band director and told to go practice. It is not known whether other students faced the same treatment over instrument choice, or whether this was unique to women. Two of these three women, Jan and Wally, had no personal choice when it came to their job within the Army. Once the Army found out that they could play musical instruments, they were assigned to be musicians. This aligned with two of the Vietnam-era veterans in the survey, who both intended on joining with different jobs, but were put into the band when it was realized they could play instruments. The other Vietnam-era veterans joined with the purpose of playing as instrumentalists. Helen, Deb, and Kelly all got to choose the instrument they played in school and in the Army, but they were faced with other threats to their personal choice. Helen wanted to go to the Army School of Music but could not because women were not allowed to go in 1971. Morden (1990) found that in the 1970s women who auditioned for the WAC band knew right away that they would serve in the band unless they requested training and reenlistment in another Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), but most stayed with the band throughout their service.

Students are allowed more of a choice in the instrument they wish to play now as opposed to the past, however, many instruments still hold gendered stereotypes. According to

Wrape, Dittloff, and Callahan (2016), instrument gender stereotypes remain highly prevalent, with some instruments being labeled as more masculine, and some more feminine. Typically, the flute, oboe, and clarinet are described as feminine instruments, whereas the trumpet, trombone, euphonium, tuba, and percussion are described as masculine. Helen had to fight for her status as a female tuba player in her school band. Her band director refused to let her march in parades with her tuba, instead making her play the smaller euphonium. Tuba has been gender-stereotyped for decades as a masculine instrument. Even as recent as 2016, in the study by Wrape, Dittloff, and Callahan, of 99 middle school students, all 99 of them described the tuba as a “boy instrument.” While this does not affect every child’s choice in their beginning instrument, it does hold significance in some decisions.

Personal choice extended beyond instruments to include the motivation for enlisting in the Army. Many of the women were either looking for more opportunities than their hometown and societal expectations could provide at the time of their enlistment or were looking for a space in which to be a female musician- something else that was beyond societal expectations at the time. Jan could not see herself staying in her hometown because she felt she would be left with no choice but to settle down and immediately start a family with someone local. Wally, the oldest child amongst her siblings, feared being left to take care of her parents as they aged. These traditional circumstances, for many women of this era, were not enough for these two women. Neither Sylvia nor her family could afford to purchase an instrument, so she decided on enlisting so she could continue to play on the government-issued baritone. Helen, like many of the participants, joined so that she could be able to pay for college once she got out of the Army. This was one of my motivating factors for joining the

Army National Guard Band; I was able to relieve some student debt through joining, and this is a large reason for many who enlist today. Sylvia came from a tradition of service; her father had served for 5 years in the Army and was incredibly proud of her decision to enlist. This was another reason I felt compelled to join; I idolized my grandfather who had served in WWII and felt compelled to serve my country as well. Deb and Kelly had more personal influences; Deb's twin sister joined, so she felt the need to also, and Kelly's prom date inspired her to join. Deb and Kelly were influenced by the important relationships in their lives and figured that the military was worth giving a chance. Enlisting in the WAC band provided choices for these women in their personal lives, their careers, and the future opportunities that would present themselves.

### **The Women's Rights Movement and Changes in Military Protocol**

The women in this study had training that was much different from their male counterparts of the time. Morden (1990) cited that half of the basic training time for male enlistees was devoted to weapons use and tactical training, and that kind of training was considered inappropriate for the duties that the WAC soldiers would be assigned. In the earliest years, the women learned how to apply makeup and look presentable during basic training which had little to do with Army enlistment and everything to do with the public presentation of the WAC band. They never held a rifle or focused on marksmanship, like in today's Army. According to Morden (1990), the Women's Army Corps basic training from 1950 through 1973 was 8 weeks and the first week consisted of receiving immunization shots, a dental check-up, being fitted for uniforms, and initiating their Army personnel file. This is similar to today, where soldiers first go to what is called reception, where the soldier goes

through administrative and health stations before moving over to the basic training area. Morden (1990) then stated that the rest of training included subjects like physical training, personal hygiene, social hygiene, military justice, organization of the Army, and military customs and courtesies. It was clearly important to the Army that the highly visible women soldiers exhibit good behavior on and off duty. Crane, Lynch, Sheets, and Reilly (2019) stated that men's basic training in 1973 consisted of 8 weeks of rigorous training, 49% of the time spent on garrison training (drill and ceremony, intelligence, and inspections), 33% of the time spent on lethality (rifle marksmanship, weapon familiarization, and hand to hand combat), and 18% of the time spent on individual soldier skills (physical training, first aid, and tactical training). According to Morden (1990), it was not until 1974 that WAC recruits could participate in a basic rifle familiarization course. Even though it was voluntary, 90% of the women opted to fire. The Army did not see value in training women for combat prior to 1974. Instead, the Army focused on training the women to meet high ethical and moral standards in their highly visible roles.

### ***The New Standard For All***

Today's Army basic training is mostly co-ed, except for two of the five Army basic training installations which are male-only. Basic training is 10 weeks, consisting of 3 phases. Soldiers start with what is called reception, where paperwork, physical exams, haircuts, uniform fittings, and a physical fitness test happen. The soldiers then move on into the red phase, where they learn about Army traditions, values, and the fundamentals of soldiering. Once the red phase is complete, soldiers move on to the white phase where they begin to learn basic rifle marksmanship, combat skills, teamwork, and self-discipline. When the white phase is complete,

soldiers move on to the third and final phase, the blue phase, where they learn advanced weapons training, military operations, and field training exercises. At co-ed training installations, men and women follow the same training regimen. This basic training regimen is consistent no matter what job placement has been selected, including those individuals being placed in military bands.

### ***Changes With Equal Opportunity***

While opportunities in careers and music making were some of the things these women were seeking, it was not until the 1970s that they began to have more choice in what opportunities they got, but other changes were happening as well. According to Morden (1990), the WAC band was at its peak of development in 1972 when the Army ordered the band to be integrated with male personnel. This was a response to the Equal Opportunity in Education Act in 1972 that was a federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in educational and government-funded institutions. In July of 1972, Colonel Garrison, the WAC Center commander, wanted to preserve the all-female band by requesting that it be designated as a Special Band. This was turned down, and in 1974, several male bandsmen asked to be assigned to the WAC band at Fort McClellan. According to Sullivan (2008), the Act not only integrated women into all-male bands, but men were now allowed into all-female bands. Women were allowed to transfer to Army bands across the country and world and could play alongside their male counterparts.

### ***From On the Job to the Army School of Music***

Musical education opportunities during their enlistment varied for the veterans. For Sylvia, Jan, and Wally, they were sent to the band upon enlistment, and had no formal music

training while they were in the band. Their education consisted of rehearsals and sectionals, and any practicing that they did on the side for themselves. Helen really wanted to go to the Army School of Music, but they were not allowing women in 1971. This aligns with Jones's (2002) statement that it was not until the 1970s that most female Army musicians attended the Army School of Music. Helen remembered that the band started to offer some classes at night for music theory and history which afforded her opportunity for further development. Deb was the first person from the WAC band to go straight to Advanced Individual Training (AIT) at the Army School of Music following basic training in 1975. Deb attended AIT for 6 months. Kelly also went straight through basic training and then to the school of music, where her AIT was also 6 months in length. Her unit (now co-ed) also provided night classes sponsored by the local university where the soldiers could learn various subjects in music along with taking lessons on their principal instrument. The leadership of her unit wanted more for their soldiers than just on-the-job training. They sought to make their soldiers stronger musicians through an advanced music education.

### ***Women's Rights Brought Job Choice***

The era of the 1970s was a key time in the women's rights movement in general. This progression of education in music during enlistment reflects the development of opportunities being offered to women within military service and within the larger society. According to Morden (1990), the 1960s brought the need to provide more diversified jobs to women serving in the Army, which led to the opening of technical, repair, and maintenance Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs), but women were still required to work in clean environments using machines such as communications equipment, office machines, and flight operations



devices. After 1972, all but 48 MOSs were opened to women, no matter whether they were considered clean or dirty. The 48 MOSs not available were combat MOSs. According to Rice (2015), in 2013, then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta rescinded the 1994 rule prohibiting women from assignment to combat units. This then opened the remaining 19 jobs (including infantry, armor, cavalry, fire support, and special forces) previously closed to women.

The length of service for these women changed as opportunities within and beyond the military changed as well. The women who served before the Vietnam era chose to serve for shorter periods of time than those during the Vietnam era. Sylvia, Jan, and Wally did not serve past their initial enlistment. Perhaps this was because the Army provided a way for them to escape the pressures and limitations at home, and once they had gotten a taste of life away from those restrictions, they could then find ways to live a life that fit bigger dreams for their future. According to Kerbey (2015), female soldiers prior to the early 1950s would be involuntarily discharged if they got married, and female soldiers all the way up until 1975 would be involuntarily discharged if they got pregnant. Jan decided to get married in 1956, and by that time, it was not an involuntary discharge, but she took the honorable discharge option given to her. After hearing that she would have to sign over her parental rights as a single parent, Wally decided to not pursue an enlistment with the Army National Guard band.

The women during the Vietnam era served much longer enlistments. Helen, Deb, and Kelly all served 20 years each through their combined choice of active duty and reserve service. For them, enlisting was more about continuing to have music in their daily lives than it was about escaping home life expectations. While Helen went on to pursue a writing career both in the Army and in her civilian life, Deb and Kelly continued playing music for the Army for 20

years each. If you wanted to play music professionally as a woman at this time, the Army band was one of just a few ways that you could make this happen. According to Sullivan and Keck (2007), many women chose to form all-female bands to avoid discrimination and create opportunity for themselves.

### **Music Was More Than a Job**

Music was not always the leading factor in the decision these women made to join, but it certainly impacted the military job they would be expected to fulfill. Jan wanted to go into the signal corps, or a job that focused on finance, because she feared any job related to music would lead her towards teaching; something she specifically did not want to do. According to Pidgeon (1954), the most popular jobs for women in 1950 were secretaries, saleswomen, teachers, waitresses, and nurses. When the army leadership heard about Jan's musical talent from her hometown teacher, she was sent to audition with the band. Wally had hoped to become an MP (military police), but when she raised her hand when asked who had any musical instrument experience, she soon found herself heading to the band headquarters. Two of the other veterans also remarked that they had intended on going into the Army for different jobs- one for communications and the other to be a medic- but once it was found out that they could play instruments, they were told their job would be with the band. Jan and Wally were surprised to be placed in the band since neither of them thought that they were good enough players to be in the WAC band. The decision to place them in the band, which was made for them, left them feeling nervous and uncertain about their futures. The Army's decision to take job choice away from these women removed opportunities that they thought

to find through military service. The alternative job placement, however, opened up avenues that supported some of them far beyond their military years.

### ***The Impact of Music Education***

All of the women had some music education experience prior to joining military service. While Sylvia, Jan, and Wally did not have a say in the instrument they learned in middle and high school, they all played in their local high school bands growing up. Helen, Deb, and Kelly came from high schools that had strong band programs, although Helen was not admitted to the theory classes at her high school since they were reserved for male students. Two of the other veterans enlisted with college music experience. They knew that they wanted to continue to play their instruments at a high level, and the WAC band was one of the few ways for female musicians to accomplish that in the 1970s.

The WAC band provided a space for music making that was free of gender stereotypes because women soldiers were needed in every section of the band. The music brought them together to create a beautiful art form, and they shared it with the country on their tours. This time spent together whether on tours or on post formed the camaraderie that is still present today among those who served. The veterans recognize that their service was unique and come together to reminisce and reflect on their time together at the reunions.

Once the women were out of the army, most of the veterans remained active in the music world. Jan went on to receive her bachelor's degree in organ performance and church music and was performing on organ and piano up until about 3 years ago at the age of 83. Helen took some music classes but found her calling in writing. She still plays in community music groups. Deb got her degree in music, taught band for a few years, and now sings with a

local choir. Kelly studied music therapy and now plays flute and piccolo for her town's community band. She wanted to use her music therapy skills working with patients in the local Veteran's Administration hospital but found a different career path in the VA. All 8 of the other participants went on to continue music until the present and have college experience with music once they were out of the army, even the participants who said they intended to join the army for other jobs. Music was not the intended entry point for each woman, but the experience led to a lifetime of music in some form.

### ***The Sisterhood***

The WAC band reunions showed a point of unity in the thoughts of this group of women. Everyone was excited to see the people with whom they had served and meet new people who served in a similar capacity, but in a different time. In a military world dominated by men, these women were privileged to be chosen for the Women's Army Corps Band. As Kerbey (2015) stated, the United States Army was the first U.S. branch of military service to hire female musicians and continues to be the largest employer for full-time musicians.

The soldiers of the WAC band spent a lot of time together while in service. Morden (1990) stated that the band went on tours between 1951 and 1973, and toured through almost every state in the U.S. The tours would take the women to community events, civic centers, colleges, and high schools, where they would play for parades or concerts (see Figure 8). Army recruiters loved these events, as they increased public awareness of the Women's Army Corps.



*Figure 8. WAC Band on Tour, 1974. (Source: Helen's personal collection).*

Sylvia enjoyed representing the WWII era veterans at the reunions, although she felt the band treated her too much like “royalty.” For Jan and Wally, the reunions were a chance to reconnect with the “sisters” with whom they had lost touch over the years. For Helen and Deb, the reunions provided a chance to enjoy the camaraderie of sharing such a unique past with these other women. Kelly is excited and hopeful to experience the reunion for the first time in 2022. Whether their enlistments were just over a year or 20 years in length, the women have felt a deep connection to those with whom they served, as well as those who served before, or after them.

### **Summary**

These reunions, and the special invitation that I received to be part of the reunion in 2018, opened up a connection to the lives and stories of these women who chose (or were chosen) to serve our country through the Women’s Army Corp band. The history that they have

revealed outlines contrasts and parallels to current practices in women's military service and band participation, which will be shared in the following chapter along with implications for music education and further research into these traditions.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

All research begins centered on a specific set of questions that help to give it direction. The researcher, themselves also brings a context and lens to the research that influences what is found and how it is disseminated. This research study into the lives and work of the women in the Women's Army Corps Band can serve to broaden the view of music educators, military musician researchers, gender studies researchers, and music history researchers.

#### **Gaps in Research**

While there is some research that exists regarding the women military band members of World War II, there are gaps in the research of the women who served in the wars after it. The Vietnam War is often the war that is overlooked or forgotten about because of its controversiality, but the veterans of this era all have a story to tell. More information should be gained on why women joined the military in this era, especially before the Equal Opportunity Act took place.

An additional area of opportunity for research would be women's involvement in school bands in the 1940s through 1970s. Through the interviews of the veterans, the theme of a lack in personal choice when it came to what instrument they wished to play in school came to the forefront. It would be important to understand if this was common for those decades, or if it just happened to be for those interviewed in this project.

#### **Current Practices for Military Band Service**

The process for women entering an Army band today is much different than the veterans who were interviewed. As a reservist, after I became interested in the band, I was

allowed to visit rehearsals and see if it was something that I would want to do. Once I wanted to start the process of enlisting, I had to audition on my primary instrument with the commander of the band. The audition showed that I was proficient enough on my instrument to enter the unit and begin to perform with little additional training. After passing the audition, I then spoke with an Army recruiter and scheduled to go to the Military Entrance Processing Station (or MEPS). At MEPS, I took the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Test (or ASVAB) that every military candidate must take. The scores from this test determines what jobs the candidate will be qualified for if the jobs are available. The categories of the test cover general science, math, reading, electronics, automotive, and mechanical comprehension. Once my test scores came through, I worked with the recruiters to schedule my basic training and Army School of Music training. It was at this point that I had to specify purposefully that I wanted to be in the band unit and they had to verify that I passed an audition. Once everything was scheduled, I attended basic training and went straight through to the Army School of Music for Advanced Individual Training. In comparison to the women in this study who entered service before 1975, this is a much different process, and is now the same process for both men and women wishing to join.

In many ways, my motivations for serving were like the WAC band veterans' motivations. I wanted to continue playing trombone at a high level once I finished my undergraduate degree. Knowing that I wanted to teach full-time, I needed a band that did not meet for rehearsals too often. The Army National Guard band fit that requirement, as our drill (when we report) is only one weekend a month, and then a 2-week commitment in the summer every year. I had always felt compelled to serve, as my grandfather had served in World War II,



and I always admired his service to our country. He was also a trombone player, so when it came time to pick band instruments in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I knew right away what I wanted to play. It was my choice to make, and my family and teacher supported it.

Another motivation for joining was the benefits that come along with serving. My final semester of undergraduate studies was covered once I enlisted, and I was given a student loan repayment benefit when I reenlisted. There was also an affordable health insurance along with many other discounts and veteran's benefits. These reasons align with why many people choose to serve in the military today.

### **Implications for Music Education**

Women are widely accepted into civilian co-ed bands and orchestras through blind auditions and have multiple outlets for making music both professionally and as an avocation. Some still choose to make music in all-female groups as well. I was fortunate enough to be introduced to the Women's Army Corps through Jan's friend Karen, who I met when I joined Ladies Must Swing, a local all-female swing band that has been playing together in Madison, Wisconsin since 1997. I had first been asked to be a substitute player for Ladies Must Swing (LMS) for the bass trombonist who was on vacation. It was the First Sergeant of my National Guard unit at the time who contacted me about playing in the group, as she is the first alto saxophonist with LMS. I was thrilled to be given the opportunity of playing with an all-female swing (or big) band, as I have loved that genre of music since I was young. I remember attending a Glenn Miller Orchestra concert when I was in high school with a few of my friends, and thinking, 'why are there no women in this band except for the singer?' I then went home and started researching big bands only to find out that the majority of bands, past and present,

were all-male. I remember feeling disheartened thinking that I would not be able to continue playing in this style that I loved so much, so when I learned about LMS and was offered some performances as a substitute, I participated as much as I could. This eventually led to my full-time status in the group when the bass trombonist moved out of state.

### ***Connections to My Own Teaching***

Remembering those discouraging feelings when I discovered that the Glenn Miller Orchestra was all-male has helped drive my own teaching of female middle school band students. I place a large emphasis on the fact that instruments are not gendered, and that anyone can play any instrument in the band. I often share my experiences about being in the military and serving as a musician. I remember one student from my high school student teaching placement exclaiming, “women can’t be in the Army!” It was an important opportunity at that point to educate those in the classroom.

It is also important to inform students about opportunities for playing in military bands as a continuation of playing after high school. I did not know that there were military bands until I was already studying in my undergraduate program and I did not learn that there were part-time military bands (National Guard and Reserves) in my state until I attended my state’s music educator conference and visited my future unit’s booth. It is important to share these opportunities with students, as they can be helpful ways for them to pay for college and make connections in the music world. In the recruiting process, it is important to include females who can speak with potential female recruits. At times in my service, I was the only female in the back row of the band (trumpets, trombones, euphoniums, and tubas), but when I went on a

recruiting mission for the band, I was able to speak to the female students to help them feel more comfortable about females serving in the Army bands.

### ***Recommendations to Carry the Musical Torch***

The music education within the Army bands should include a presentation about the Women's Army Corps Band. I think it is important that while at the Army School of Music, all soldiers learn about this unique band. Knowing about the history of the bands and the steps that veterans had to take to get us to where we are today is important, and that future musician soldiers should help to preserve that legacy.

### **Conclusions**

The Equal Opportunity Act of 1972 brought shifts within the Army bands. Men were being integrated into the Women's Army Corps Band, and women were starting to be integrated into the other active-duty bands. While this change led to the co-ed Army bands of today, I cannot help but think of the mixed emotions the soldiers must have been experiencing at that time. While equal opportunities are of course a good and necessary thing, the women were losing their band that was free from gender stereotypes and losing the camaraderie that serving in an all-female unit provided.

Even though I have only known an integrated Army, the Women's Army Corps band veterans have welcomed me into their sisterhood. It was Karen who asked that I be invited to the reunion in 2018 to help support the trombone section and playing alongside women (see Figure 9) with a combined hundreds of years of service is something I look forward to at the 2022 reunion.

The leadership of the WAC band reunions have already decided that 2022 will be the

final WAC band reunion, due to the advancing age of the veterans. While I expect many of the veterans will continue to get together informally as their situations allow, I feel there is now a need for a larger female military musician reunion or conference. This would help strengthen the camaraderie amongst all female military musicians and bridge the gap between those serving in different eras of history.

They may not have known it at the time, but the soldiers of the Women's Army Corps paved the way for female musicians like me to serve our country through musicianship. I am thankful for their service, and am a better musician, soldier, and teacher for having gotten to know them.



*Figure 9.* Participants of the 2018 WAC Band Reunion. (Own photo).

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Transcripts

#### Sylvia Interview

J: When did you enlist?

S: I joined the Army in 1943, September 28. And I played the baritone horn in the first WAC band.

J: Why did you enlist in the Army?

S: There was notice and paper that said they need musicians will supply the instruments. So I said, I'm gonna join, I was too young. I was 20. But the age to get in was 21 at that time. And I was waiting until my 21st birthday and praying that the war would be over, so I didn't have to go because I was scared to death to go. I was never away from home before. At 20 at my time, a woman never left home until she got marriage. I was never heard the states of New York, New Jersey or Pennsylvania until I joined the Army. And then they sent me to Florida for basic. It was a little scary at first. But then we got to be friends with each other. It was interesting.

My father was a five year Army veteran. And he was very proud. My mother's said to me, just be sure you want to go in? Because they don't let you well until very let you out. But they didn't stop me. I mean, it was during the war, there were plenty jobs available, then. I would have made out all right at home. But it would have been a dull life.

J: How long were you in the Army?

S: I was with the band for 16 months. And I was in the Army for 28 months.

J: What did you do while in the Army Band?

S: We played for all the troops when they went overseas, and when they came back again. We were stationed at Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn, and they transported us to New York to the piers. It was a pretty rough feeling when they were leaving, but coming back, it was so joyful. The people in the military when I went in, some of them were professional musicians. They played in groups like Ina Ray Hutton's All Girl Band.

J: What did you do for the Army besides the band?

S: I was the chief fire clerk at Station Hospital in Camp Kilmer.

J: And why did you leave the army?

S: I don't know. There was too much politics in the band. And I was harassed by the trombone player. I don't know, I just didn't fit in there after a while, so I transferred.

But it made me glow up. I mean, I really grew up in the army. When I went in, there was very little I knew about outside life. But I learned real fast. I mean, we had all kinds of orientation courses. You had to learn and being with other people taught me a lot too. I really enjoyed learning about people.

J: What brings you back to the reunions?

S: The people, they are wonderful, everyone. I have never been a group of two people like I mean, maybe it's the camaraderie with between musicians. I think that's what it is. They are a great bunch.

I don't know what to say. They treat me like a celebrity. And I'm not a celebrity. I only happen to have been born before they were. And I happened to join the army when it was brand new.

### **Jan Interview**

JT: Jan, when did you enlist in the army?

J: In August of 1954

JT: And how long did you serve?

J: It was just over a year, and then I got married. And back then you could get out if you got married. You didn't have to. But if you got pregnant by a civilian, you were discharged.

JT: Did they consider that like an honorable discharge?

J: Right.

JT: Okay. And we kind of talked about this earlier. But if you don't mind saying again, why did you enlist in the army?

J: Because I grew up in a small town that your choices were marry some guy that works in a gas station and have a dozen kids. You know, parents did not save for girls to go to college. And I wanted to go to college. But that was not possible. So then, when I was offered the scholarship, it wasn't what I wanted. My sister was working in the recruiting station. So she said, why don't you join the army? So I went over and talked to him. And I decided that that was what I would do. Sounds like a good alternative. It got me out of town. And the scholarship was for the music school, with the major in flute.

JT: But like you said, you weren't really wanting to teach necessarily, either?



J: No, I did not want to teach. Yeah, there were two things I knew I did not want to be when I grew up, always. I didn't want to be a teacher. And I didn't want to be a nurse. Which were pretty common pathways for women at the time. I know, when I was in high school, my mom wanted me to take typing, and shorthand. And I said, No. And she said, well, what do you mean no. What are you gonna do when you graduate? And I said, I don't know. But I'd rather sit on a park bench and starve than do typing in shorthand. So then, when I was a senior, I asked for a typewriter for Christmas. She said, I thought you didn't want to type, you didn't even take typing. And I said, I can teach myself to type. I didn't say I didn't want to know how to type. I said, I didn't want to do that for a living. And I certainly didn't want to spend a whole year in school wide. Right, you know. So anyway, she got me a typewriter.

JT: And just like how you taught yourself flute too?

J: The band director just said, here's a flute. Here's a fingering chart your chart, blow on it, like you do a pop bottle.

JT: So this question, what role did music play in your decision to enlist? Really, you didn't enlist with the idea of being a musician at first? Because like you said, either the Signal Corps or finance?

J: Music played the role that that was not what I wanted to do, because I would end up teaching school,

JT: But your band director had already put in a word with the people that the WAC band?

J: The guy who offered me this scholarship called Lieutenant Painters. And because he knew her, you know, we were all we all lived in the same area, right? And this university was in the same area. Okay.

JT: What university did you say that was?

J: Marshall University. And so he just called and said go get her. So, yeah.

JT: So you didn't have much of a choice?

J: No, the reason I didn't, I couldn't say no. Because if the band wanted you, that's where you went.

JT: And were you already like you were already enlisted at that point?

J: I was in basic training. Yes, probably fourth week, fifth week,

JT: And then they decided that was going to be your job?

J: And then I heard the band. You know, I heard it just before that, and I heard it again, like, I'm not good enough to play that band. Everybody thought that that is so neat. Everybody who played in that band ever thought they weren't good enough to play in it?

JT: I know that feeling today. Even I don't feel like I'm good enough to play in the Guard Band most days. And I guess that's always been a thing.

J: Well, I think that's a musician. Yeah. We can always be better. We can always play the notes quicker or cleaner or whatever.

JT: And what instruments do you play? I know you play piano. And flute. And Piccolo, of course. Are there any others?

J: I also play pipe organ.

JT: Were there any other instruments that they like put you on? During the WAC band?

J: No. Just that damn piccolo.

JT: And how many reunions have you attended?

J: However many there were.

JT: You've attended all since the start?

J: Yeah. '04, '06, '08, '10, '12, '14, '16, '18

JT: Eight. Okay. How did they come about? Like starting the reunions, since you've been to all of them so far?

J: Well, it has nothing to do with how I found out about it. But Karen and Dixie were just sitting around and they decided maybe they might put some feelers out and see if anybody would be interested in having a reunion. And so it just kind of ballooned. Then I told you about my trips to take for the Mystery Writers of America and I would stop at Maryland. So on my way back, I stopped. And that was about a week. And right after I got there, she said, Jan, the WAC band is going to have a reunion in October. And this was like March. She said, would you go with me? And I said as far as I know I'm not doing anything in October. She said okay, so she gets up and runs because she's she was having lots of hearing problems. She went to the other room and she comes back and picks me up takes me over and sits me down but a telephone she said here calling make reservations at the hotel. Because she couldn't hear. And she said I'll get them to send you a registration. I said okay. So I booked this in to the hotel. And then I don't know. week or so later, after I got home. I got a registration form. And it said

what instruments do you play? So I put foot piccolo keyboard or piano pipe organ and it said, Will you play for the concert? And I said no. I said unless you have some needed like Dinner Music or combo music or something like that. I said I could do that on keyboard but not for the concert. So I get this phone call from Karen. The first time I ever talked to her I didn't know her. So she said well, on here it says you won't play but that you do play keyboard and I said, yeah. She said, what kind of keyboard do you play? And I said, well, I've got a Cort. And she said, don't I mean, what kind of music? I said, oh, well, I said, I've played in big bands, and I've played in combos, and I've done singles. And so I said, also play at Hammond B3 organ, but I don't have one anymore. But I used to play that. So she said, well, we have what's called a grip and rip at the mixer. The day before the reunion starts, it's the day everybody comes in on that evening. And she said, it's just whoever wants to play. But usually we have a combo and piano. Would you be interested in doing that? I said, Sure. I said, sounds like it's right up my alley. So I agreed to that. Then I get it. She made some kind of comment, because that I didn't quite understand. But I realized that this woman had never heard me play. She had no idea whether I could play or not, you know, right. And I said, well, maybe to get some kind of idea of how I play. I have a Christmas CD that I made, if you be interested in hearing it, I'll send it to you. So I fire off this Christmas CD. I get a phone call right back. For the opener, we want to do the way we were. And could you do that for a singer? And I said why don't see by now and I said but you have to tell me what key you want to be in. So anyway, she heard played that I played it.

So I agreed to do that. Then I get a phone call. And she said, how you feel about rock music? I said I have never played a piece of rock music in my life.

And she said well, would you play? Would I play with the dance band? And I said yeah. The next one was how do I feel? I said, well, you're gonna have to send me the music. Cuz I'm gonna have to figure it out. But this time I could read. When I got out of the army, I went to the conservatory of music in Cincinnati. And in order to get into the Conservatory, I had to pass the boards. And I had to sight read a piece of classical music. So I taught myself to read music.

Well, over one summer when I was pregnant, and no, it was spring and summer I was pregnant. And that process is backwards when you've been playing by ear. It's exactly backwards from how you teach somebody to read music, right? So anyway, they sent me the music for the rock band. And I thank God, I hope they don't have anything else.

So from agreeing to do a little dinner music, I ended up with the grip and grin, the rock band and the opener.

And it was the only reunion I ever went to that. I had Roadies. Karen met me at a service station and directed me in. When I got there, all these women run out and they unload my keyboard. And they take it in, and she says, now you tell him how to put it up. And they'll put it up when they have to. So I told them how to put it together. So I forgot what your question.

JT: Oh, um, what we talked about, oh, how many reunions you have attended. And what keeps you still going to them?

J: See the people and oh, yeah, play the music again. Yeah, I mean, Karen had a theory I don't think it particularly applied to me because it wasn't true of me. But many of them she said you know since they got out of the army they've been wives they've been mothers. They've been grandmothers but they've not doing anything in their own right. And she said this is a chance to remember when they did do something in their own right and they can do it again. I think she was right I think yeah but I just enjoy the seeing everybody and getting together and talking. But that's why I go back. Yeah. I just want to see everybody and see how they're doing. Yeah, just get together and catch up. And yet. There is almost nobody still playing.

JT: We talked about your music education. Do you remember having like music education in school, like even before high school at all, like, just general music or anything like that? And you said, because you were going to be major at you had to play an instrument for the concert band season?

J: Yeah.

JT: So then, did you did you say you chose flute or?

J: No. He went in the back room and I called it my full word fix a repaired daily. It was always having, you know, things fall off springs popping off.

JT: And then did you have any, like, on the job training, you know, like, so like for the army?

J: Yeah, the only thing we had when I was in was we had a second lieutenant. That was called the assistant band director. She got drummed out of the band, because I was sick and in the hospital and she can visit me every day. We had kind of she heard me playing the piano one day, and she was a pianist. Oh, okay. And she came down. And she helped me with a few things, you know, that I hadn't thought about. And we got to talk. And so when I was in the hospital, she would come every day to see me. So they drummed her out of the band center off to some of the plays for fraternizing. But she gave us a class on music theory. Okay. And that was when in that music theory class. This picture of the circle of fifths. And Jenny, it was like somebody handed me the key to the kingdom. It answered all the questions. And I went, this is so awesome, you know, because by that time, I had learned the names of the chords I was playing, right. I couldn't read them, but I knew what key I was in. And I knew what chords I was playing. So the circle of fifths was like, Oh, gee, it all makes sense, though. And it did. Wow. And then, of course, there were other things which would have been the initial steps to learning to read music, although they didn't tell you the names of the notes, they did tell you the names of the lines and the spaces. Oh, okay, you know the mmm the grand staff right? All this and how it fits together and so, there was that kind of training. I think we had that either a half hour or an hour a week.

JT: So basically how the army just said, Okay, here you go. This is what you're gonna do. Now.

J: This is what we got to do. If you want to get paid you did it. I guess. There's no nothing. Not until after I got out.

JT: And then you went to the conservatory?

J: I went to both State University and state pipe organ. And church music.. And I directed choir and played pipe organ Lutheran Church and that I got the job and I didn't know how to play it. But man, you can really learn on the spot very well. That's what they hired me on for. It was the Sunday before Easter. Oh. And the church choir. Oh, that was a great choir. The church choir was supposed to perform the Hallelujah Chorus on Easter Sunday morning. So I go on Wednesday night, the choir rehearsal. And I looked at the choir director and I said, tell you what, I cannot play the bass pedals. But I can do the bass part in my left hand and play the rest. She said, well, if you must, and I said, well, if you want me to play, that's why it's gonna be because I can't do it.

So that's what I did. And then that was when I went to Muncie to learn how to play this. And what was so neat, it was the neatest thing. This church had this that I was playing and had this beautiful Schlenker Baroque or pipe organ. And when I went to Muncie to take lessons in the chair of the music department taught piperine so I walk in his classroom and here's that slicker Baroque pipe organ exactly like the one I'm going to be playing, how great can that be? But I think that's all the training I ever had.

JT: And then from there you went on to gig and playing the big band?

J: Oh, I was already gigging in the big bands by that time. I mean, it's always just been flung at me. We need you for this, okay. When I got divorced, I figured it out finally. Then he through all his stuff, he's the one that had me do it all. You know, I wrote his thesis for him when he got his master's degree and all of his classes, I would help him. So I knew all this stuff by the time. By the time he got his degrees, I would know everything that he'd studied because I would grill him and write, like symphonies. I would stand at the record player and just play excerpts. And he would have to name what symphony it was. And I could do it by the time he got his degree. But he would give me all these things to do. They were just, I mean, like that playing with John's band. Yeah. In a way I thought it was me because it was kind of terrifying. Right? It's really, you know, and, but it ended up to be a really wonderful thing for me. But after we got divorced, it was quite a while after we got divorced, I thought, you know what? All he wanted me to do is fail. If I did just fail, we probably still would be together.

JT: But you just couldn't fail.

J: Or just say I can't do it. Hmm. I don't know how to do that. I just don't know. That's a good quality, it goes against my internal organs. Right. To say I can't Yeah, you know, yeah. So would you say I'm a person who likes challenges?

JT: I would say so

## **Wally Interview**

J: And so, when did you enlist?

W: In 1958

J: Okay. And how long did you serve?

W: I was in until 1960. And then I went to the National Guard after my kids, were, you know, I had kids and that but, I had a little problem with the Guard because they wanted me to sign a release of custody of my kids, and I said absolutely not.

J: They wanted you to sign a release of custody?

W: To be in the guard. Well, yeah, because we might go to war. And I said to them, you've got guys here. Have they signed? Well, no. And I said, Well, wow.

Interview Notes:

Kathy "Wally"

1958-1960

Enlisted to "get away from family and not have to take care of them until death." (Wally was the oldest child)

Wanted to be an MP (Military Police) but raised her hand when asked if anyone played an instrument.

"Never raise your hand for anything."

Instrument: Trombone

7th grade music education: started band

Mom said she could play the clarinet but she came home with a trombone because that's what the band director had and wanted her to play.

(Prior to band) Was not a fan of piano lessons or piano teacher. Quit awhile before her mom found out she quit.

No formal Army music school or music training.

Everything was in-house like sectionals.

## **Helen Interview**

J: Okay, so, my first question is when did you enlist?

H: In 1971 and I attempted to enlist at the beginning of the summer for 1971 and I auditioned in Daytona, Florida. The band was down there for firecracker. So I auditioned down there, passed the audition and all, but then I was denied entry into the army. Because at the time, I had double vision. Oh, and all the men were being sent to Vietnam with double vision, women could not be considered for a waiver. So I was very, very fortunate that the fellow that I was taking lessons with his wife was very involved in the National Organization for Women. And

Roxcy Bolton, was the president at the time. And she is the same lady that's famous for getting our hurricanes named after men as well as women. Okay, so she definitely went to bat for me, and she had some contacts in Washington, DC. And she had some friends. I don't know if she was a friend or not. But anyway, a contact with the Associated Press. So there's this big press thing that went on. And as soon as I unearth it around here, I can send you a picture of the of the main article that was written about me, and then the follow up articles and such. So on September 9 of 71, I was finally allowed in that that law was changed. So yeah, yeah, that's, that's kind of cool. But it's awesome little piece of the puzzle. But every piece matters when you're putting together a puzzle. That's what got me through college because my parents couldn't afford to send me you know.

J: Do you remember the audition?

H: It was the Watkins Farnum test. And I don't know if I still have a copy around here. Or if I put in in with a bunch of memorabilia we sent to Dr. Hersey. Probably if you Google Watkins Farnum. I think that's the name of it. Okay. It was an audition book. It's totally sight reading. And the pieces got more difficult as you go through the book.

J: And then, how long did you serve for?

H: At that time, it was a three year enlistment. But they were doing early outs because we were winding down the Vietnam War. So I got out three months early, and went on to college. And I joined the Florida National Guard in Starke, Florida. And I was the first woman and the Starke National Guard there and Starke, it that had its own challenges. Oh, yeah, these guys were a bunch of prison guards, rednecks and that sort of thing. And there were a few folks that were pretty kind to me to help me understand such. So that's a whole messy situation there. But it got counted to my time and I got out and then got back in and whatever. And I ended up actually retiring from the Army Reserves. And the series of events that led to that it's nothing short of a miracle. But I feel very blessed to have done that.

J: Yeah, that's great. So did you change your MOS then because I don't there's not a band in Starke, right?

H: Oh, hell no. No, I was debating whether or not to go to go back to Miami or go to the University of Florida, in Gainesville. And Miami had the 13th Army Band. And so I had I was strongly considering going to that but didn't end up doing that. And at that point, though, when I joined the National Guard, I was a repair parts specialists.

J: Oh, okay.

H: I don't know, whatever was happening Jeeps or whatever was happening at the time. It was an awful job. I dreaded my every weekend. So, but you know, it's a little bit of chump change. After that I got out for a few years, it was more than five years. So when I decided to go back in it was in '81. And so, because it was more than five years, I had to go through basic again.

J: Oh, no. That is the most fun I never ever want to have again.

H: I guess the good part about it is that I was officially taught how to shoot an M 16. And, you know, there's a stronger emphasis on running and all of that. So it was difficult. It was very difficult, but somehow I made it through and I was a journalist at that time. And that's okay. You know, I, I have to say that also, I had my BA by that time, I really learned how to write when I was in the army. You know, not just the mechanics there, but to tell a story with my writing. So now I have over 20 years of tech, technical writing experience.

J: And is that your current job? Because I think the Air Force Base is right over there. Right?

H: That is correct. Okay. I'm at Hurlburt field, and I'm a technical writer.

J: That's great.

J: Oh, so was basic training a lot different than from the first time?

H: Definitely. Okay. Well, the WAC training was all women. And we did some nice little exercises and a lot of class work. And we learned how to apply makeup and all of that business. And none of this kind of second round. The second round, you know, it was a lot of running. Like I said, the PT was a lot different. And we trained with men. And granted the barracks were separate. But the training days were with men totally with men and they called it mixed company. And there's a book out called mixed company. And I put it in one of the gift things at the WAC band, the auction things or whatever. And so, but if you look, it was written, I think mid 80s something like that, but it's called mixed company. And that's the second basic that I went through, and I pride myself on having cheated in one part of basic they had this and you know, you might have had it your basic training. That huge ass tower.

I though, no, I'm not going like that. Oh, man, good times. Oh, okay. I didn't revisit a band until I was in the Washington DC area. I was part of the 257 National Guard Band Washington DC. And I played euphonium there and that's okay. That's what the position less of, you know, hey, you know, close enough for getting my work. But that's the only other musical group that I was in. And sometimes I wish I would have gone on through, you know, with all band stuff. I really, really wanted to go to school of music. At the time that I entered, women weren't going to the School of Music, they would just go strictly OJT.

J: Yeah, geez. So why did you enlist? I think we kind of talked about it because you said to pay for college?

H: Yeah, yeah. And I'm talking about free education. Although I had no college. Well, I had a couple of courses. That's about it. But probably woodwind techniques was one of them. And I forgot what else I had. But the, the high school band that I went that I attended was a highly regarded high school. And we had a tremendous band director every year who would have a clinic four days long, where all the band kids got out of regular school, and we just did the band



clinic. We had composers come down. Clifton Williams or was it Paul Yoder, it doesn't matter. But anyway, um, and different years, different composers of that caliber came down. And then we were put on this huge concert, and it was our big fundraiser and whatever. And, of course, there was the usual marching thing too, and music education at Hialeah high school, was really top, top notch for a high school setting. And my original plan was to go on to Miami Dade Jr. North and start my Associate of Arts degree in all of that, you know, going through the whole system. But my father basically said that when I graduated high school, I would have to leave the house. So that's when I decided I was going to well, actually, I wanted to join the Navy. But then I found out that the only band a woman could get into was the woman's arm corps band at the time.

J: Oh my gosh.

J: So what role did music play in your decision to enlist

H: It was my world. It was my everything. I mean, I could not talk about anything else in life, except for music and to buzz and this and that and all and talk about the anti-women attitude and music back in the day. The theory classes when I was in high school were all male.

J: Oh my gosh, on purpose, or they just highly suggested that?

H: I don't know. Perhaps during close to the time of my graduating, perhaps when I was a senior two ladies that I think of directly were French horn players. And they were very accomplished. So they may have been in the theory classes, I'm not sure. But I remember wanting to get into theory and they wouldn't let me go into theory into the news classes. My high school band director as great as he was in bringing in these composers and such. At first, he would not let me play tuba marching. So he says, euphonium or nothing. So I said, then senior year, I said, I'm playing too, but this year, and I got pretty insistent and all that and so he let me play tuba.

J: Oh, that's good.

What instrument do you play or instruments I should say?

H: Yes, string bass and tuba are the main ones. And I'm playing at trumpet. And that's my whole purpose for playing trumpet. And I tried to do some music, but I My mind was still short circuiting. You know, first, I'm reading bass clef. No, no. Oh, no, I've got it. That's one and two. Oh, that's how I might catch on at some point.

J: Oh, yeah. You'll get it, you'll get it. I play on a coronet because that's what was at my school and I found I actually can play a little higher on it versus like a regular trumpet. I don't know if it's because it's like conical or whatever. But if you ever see a coronet, that might be worth a shot.

H: Yeah, I'll give it a try. Yeah.

J: So how many of the WAC band reunions have you attended?

H: All but one.

J: What is your favorite part about attending the reunions?

H: It's seeing certain people especially my tuba buddies. Oh, and knowing people also as, as a comrade, a sister, rather than Sergeant Jensen, or you know, the rank is stripped it's just a person, a person now. And that's very neat. And some of the folks that were in the same time I was, you know, they've gone on and they've gotten their PhDs or they've done wonderful things in life. And you know, of course I sit here feel like such a slacker, but you know, I cheer on my sisters, you know?

J: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Um, so you talked a bit about the Hialeah high school music education. Did you have like a real strong, like elementary music program or middle school prior to that?

H: Well, then it was called Junior High. So, 7/8/9 grade and there was a Mr. Sutton. He was an excellent teacher. And I think the guy lived to be 101 or 102, or something like that. But he was an excellent teacher. And I felt very qualified at that point, to, to go into the Hialeah band and before seventh grade, so I went to Catholic school, and we sang hymns.

J: Ok, and then when you were in the WAC band, or in the other national guard bands, did you have any music education like during that time?

H: Um, the in the WAC band, they started having night classes, which was, and I can't say that it was top line education. But it was really exposure; I think we had music history, which I was miserable at. I mean, I was not good at it, you know. And so they did have some classes while we were there in the WAC band. And when I was in the National Guard Band in DC, the way they did it was every Monday night was rehearsal, and it's a four hour rehearsal, rather than the one weekend, a month. And that made for late Monday night, but we had our weekends free. So you know, take one or the other.

And the main education was listening to one another and hearing some top notch musicians, because the musicians that were mainly in that Washington, DC National Guard Band, or people that got out of the Marine band, or the Air Force band or whatever, oh, they just continued on there as cast musicians. That band Wow, they let me in?

How many years do you have in now?

J: Um, I'll be at nine years in May and I'll be up for reenlistment.

H: Yeah, I tell you what, that little chump change that I get every month from my reserve retirement. It helps out a lot. We wouldn't be able to afford this house if it wasn't for that.

J: And then, did you have any music education after the army?

H: Well, I attempted to, I took some music classes at Santa Fe Community College. And then, I was not accepted into the music program at University of Florida. After all, who wants a girl in their tuba section ah, gosh, and I don't know if that was part of it or not, I'll just leave it, you know. And, you know, I, when I allow myself to think about it, um, I try and think now what? What responsibility did I play in that decision? And what was just plain prejudice. And I can't take 50% blame for I just can't. And one of the good things that happens now with colleges, and I hope what's happening, where you're at as incoming freshmen. They have like orientation or acclimation classes or something like that. And I think that is the best thing. At Santa Fe, because I was an older student. And I have a very high reading comprehension, and, you know, the tests that they do. When you first get there, I forgot what kind of thing it was, but I scored pretty high on it. So I was not diagnosed as needing any sort of help with acclimation. And, you know, especially with veterans, because you come from a different life when you served on a certain number of years active. And it would have helped, I think, to have met other veterans. And but it was a different time, too. So, you know, and there's, I'm just babbling here. These days, I think that would have been held back when I was doing it, perhaps not because they were veterans, yeah, but they were draftees, and they're just happy to get out of the service and get their GI Bill and go on with life. Would have been nice to have had other female veterans, and I wouldn't have been on such an island by myself. And we had these weekly meetings, because the College of Education at University of Florida was a totally different thing. It was called childhood education program. And you would do learning activities, and you were expected to do X amount of learning activities every semester. And so you worked on that. And you had a weekly meeting with your cohort. Ladies, well, it was all ladies and I think there might have been one male, I don't know. And then comparing notes and learning and whatever. And I was always very uncomfortable in that because these sweet young things right out of high school, and then me being away from the army. It was like I was the killer in the in the group, you know, and so that that was an unfortunate situation in my college. And if there was an acclamation sort of, well, I don't know, because then I was upper division. So that wouldn't have happened anyway. I don't know. But there's a college is a totally different social atmosphere than the military. I see you nodding your head.

J: Yeah, definitely.

H: And, you know, I don't know if that's something that someday you would have The opportunity to, to develop whether you're in Milwaukee or whatever, you know, but I think that that is important, you know, and I don't care how old you are, if if you're 49 going back to school, if you even if it's a, a Facebook group, you know, and of course, I didn't have Facebook, back when I was doing this, but, you know, just have other people with similar stories that, you know, you can motivate on.

J: Oh, yeah, that'd be, that'd be a wonderful opportunity. Because even like, you know, I've met a few veterans here and there and same thing, you know, it's, there's no, like rank structure, there's no, you know, you've got all these wild 18 year old 19 year olds that, you know, just the left home. And so now, they don't know what to do with themselves. And it's just, it's totally

different from the military. So yeah, I think that would be, that would be great. Um, oh, my last question is just anything else I should be asking or that you want to add?

H: Yeah. To get me to talk. The problem is getting me to be quiet.

J: Oh, no, I love it. I love it. This is great. I mean, I know we met briefly, you know, at the reunion and everything, but it's just like, so great to get to know people and hear their stories. Yeah, I just love it

H: Oh, yeah. And that's another advantage to these reunions is that like I say I get to know people's heart and be able to put things more in perspective. And back in the day, I wouldn't give two cents for Dixie. I mean, I avoided her like the plague. But as I've gotten to know her through these reunions, I admire her I respect her. I'm just so happy about that, you know, and Goldie, I can't say enough wonderful things with having known her, she is just super quality. And you know, and they had their own challenges. So, you know, I'm just so happy for the reunions to reach that piece.

J: Definitely. Yeah, yeah. Gosh, I really hope that I get a chance to see you guys all again at the next reunion. Hopefully COVID gets the heck out of here, or at least now becomes a seasonal thing.

Well, I sure do appreciate you taking the time, especially on a Friday night to talk with me and I just had such a blast. And I would love to do that. I would love it. If you wanted to read a copy of it at some point. You're so good at writing. I would love your opinion on it once it's almost a finished product, hopefully so.

H: Well, great. And did you read a Terese Kerbey's dissertation?

J: I do have a copy of it.

H: And I have I think all of Goldie's photos. I have an external hard drive with all of Goldie's pictures on it. So if there's anything that, you know, look for something in 1955 or something, I can do it.

J: Awesome. Well, thank you so much!

H: Pleasure, absolute pleasure. And I look forward to reading what you wrote. Well, I guess I should let you go here. And I'll get back to whatever it is. I know what I'm doing around here. Cleaning up after getting this sofa in here.

J: Yeah. I can imagine there's things strewn about.

H: All right, taken care of yourself

J: You too. Thanks again!

H: You're welcome.

J: Bye now.

H: Bye.

### **Deb Interview**

J: When did you enlist?

D: I enlisted when I was still in high school. I can't remember exactly when it was for me. I think it was December of my senior year in high school. It was the delayed Entry Program. And how that happened. I'll try to make this story short. It was the 24th Infantry Division band from Georgia from Fort Stewart, Georgia. That was on a recruiting mission. I don't know where all they played, but they played at Horseheads High School in upstate New York. And very clever band. They were the recruiters that said, we know that not everybody is interested in joining the band, you musicians here. But some of you may be interested in carrying on, going to college and might like to have an audition and see what an audition is like or to see if the army would accept you, whether you want to or not. Go ahead and play an audition. And so my sister was interested. I was not; I wasn't going to. My twin sister, she was interested because she knew she wanted to play a saxophone and she was going to college. Yep. And I knew I was going to college, but Army Band was no, not interested. So anyway, she auditioned and they said, Yeah, yeah, we'd take you. But she said, Well, no, thank you. But the recruiters, of course, got her name and phone number and they were very nice. And they kept encouraging her to just come down and talk to us no obligation and well within a few weeks, they talked her into signing up because you know, making money for college, you know, and you can play your saxophone which you love to do. So that's what she did. And we were as a family. We were shocked. We were floored. because she at the time, she was very, very shy, and we thought what is she doing? Oh no, she's throwing her life away. But within a few weeks I thought, you know, that's not such a bad idea. So I did the same thing. But since the Fort Stewart band was long gone, I talked to her recruiter. And he took me to, oh, I forget someplace. I think it was in Binghamton, anyway, took me where there was going to be one of the army guys from the band in New York City at the time, and he said, oh, they'll listen to you. They'll give you an audition. And he said, Yeah, yeah, we'll take it. So that's how it started. So just the delayed entry program, both my twin sister and I, and after basic training, we both went to the Armed Forces School of Music, or what did they call it? US Army? US Army elements School of Music in the naval amphibious base. And did you go to the School of Music at all?

J: I did. Uh, huh. Yep. For AIC. I went for 10 weeks was our schooling.

D: Oh, okay. Yeah, times changed because it was a while maybe because you're a reservist or? Yeah, National Guard, National Guard. Yeah. Is it longer for the active duty folks?

J: I think for the Army active duty, they go the same time. Um, but I know like Navy and Marines, they stay there for like, I think it's four or five months that they they're staying there for.

D: Right. I think I think it's set up to be six months, but I, I didn't stay there six months. And my sister didn't either she was able to pass out of a lot of the theory because she had taken music theory classes in high school. I hadn't. But she did very well, she was able to, to play well enough on her instrument and pass out with the music theory. And I got out early. We both went in and July of 75. So we I had said before, it was December 75. It was so it was November, December of 74, that I actually raised my right hand on the delayed entry program and then went to basic training in July. But I stayed at the School of Music until our Christmas leave time, because the school was getting full. They had cranked up their Army Band recruiting, because we were getting ready to celebrate the bicentennial. And they knew that bands were needing their full, full membership to be able to, to get out there and play all these Bicentennial gigs and whatever they were doing to recruit us was working because we were just busting at the seams at the school. And there weren't enough slottings for all the students that were going to be coming in after Christmas. And so those of us who had played well enough for our incoming auditions, they said, you can, this was just for the Army folks, because the Navy wasn't going to pass anybody out. But the army said you are free to, to be passed out of the school to be sent on your way. Or you can stay on and finish your schooling if you want to. And I thought no, I'm out of here. Sure. I'm ready. Whatever I mean, if they if they want me to go I'll go and, and at the time we were busting at the seams there. We had four in our room. Stacked bunk beds, to cram all our clothes and just a couple of dressers. Yeah, it was it was amazing. But I'll always remember that the plumbing and heating system were not setup really well. Or as well as they should have been because if a person flushed the toilet, then the shower water would lose all of its cold and so you'd be scolded. Oh, the rule was if you were flushing, you had to scream out flushing. Then if someone was in the shower, they move. And a number of times, you know, you're not used to yelling, flushing. So, I know there were a number of times when I did not yell flushing and I heard a scream from. Oh, and then I'd have to yell sorry. Oh, yes. The stories.

J: Did you go to basic at Fort McClellan?

D: I was signed up for the Women's Army Corps Band. Well going back to when I first signed up, they asked, okay, what band would you be interested? And I thought, well, I asked what ones are in the Northeast? And so I was interested in going to Massachusetts. I mean, that they don't have a band there now. But I had signed up for the band in Massachusetts. And so everything was signed and sealed. Okay, I'll be going to the band in Massachusetts. And then the recruiter called me. I don't know if it was within a week or a few weeks and, and said we need to let you know that that the Women's Army Corps Band is looking for French horn player, and they are supposed to get first dibs for any woman coming in as a military musician. They had promised me this spot with a Massachusetts badn. They said since you have signed the

paperwork, you know you can do that. But the Women's Army Corps Band would like you to go to them. And I thought, well, if they want me, I guess I'll go. And I didn't know anything about the Women's Army Corps bet. Well, we in our family didn't know anything about the military bands, except you play music. So I ended up going to the Women's Army Corps Band. But the interesting thing is, I was the first one in the Women's Army Corps Band to go to AIT out of basic training, it had been before that, you finish up your basic training and you go to the other side of the post where the band is and no AIT because you had to play up to a certain level to be accepted, and it was just never the thing for their members to go to AIT. So while I was in basic training, I thought I'd be going to AIT, but I kept getting different messages sent down through the channels saying yes, you will be going to AIT. No you won't. Yes, you will. No you won't. And finally they said yes, you are going to AIT. So I was the first one. And I was the only one because I was the last woman in the band. Before we got our first male member. I arrived on January 1 of 1976. And Bob Delano came in in March. Okay, so I was right there at the transition time. Interesting days. Yeah.

J: So cool. Let's see, oh, how long did you serve?

D: I served with the Women's Army Corps Band for three years. So it was a three year commitment and with basic training in there, so it wasn't a complete three years. I ETS'd in summer of 78. And my plan was I had already been set up to, along with my sister, we were going to Ithaca College for music. And we both got our degrees in music, mine in music education. But as the time for college graduation was coming closer, I realized, well, I would like to teach but I'm, I'm still enjoying playing more than teaching right now. And so I called the recruiter to see if I could come back on active duty. And so I did. And at that time to my sister and I were we're going to the Oh, what was the name of that band? In Rochester, there was a National Guard Band or reserve band, reserve band that we were members of while we went to college. So we stayed in service as reserve band members.

J: And how long did you do that for?

D: For the four years that we were in college and my sister, she, she stayed with that band. And then when she got married and went to California, she found it was either National Guard or Reserve band. And she stayed with that band until they moved to Texas. And then she found a reserve band there. So she retired with more years of service than I did, even though I had active duty years in there, but had reserve years. She kept she kept them up.

J: So we kind of touched on this, but the role that music played in your decision to enlist, and we talked about kind of why you enlisted, but if there's anything else, kind of revolving around those questions?

D: The main reason was to, to keep on playing and make some money for college.

J: And so, I know you play French horn, are there any other instruments that you play?

D: Trumpet a little bit enough to enough to play a fifth trumpet and jazz band. That's what I ended up doing when I was stationed with the NATO band. It was we did a lot of jazz playing then. And I was I was more of an asset on fifth trumpet. Then I was on horn.

J: Okay, where's the NATO band stationed?

D: In Mons, Belgium. It was it was fun. And we were the first members of that band. It was in 86 that they made it an actual duty assignment. Before then, they tried to scare up musicians that were assigned, they're doing other things and that but they have that as a as an extra duty.

J: What kind of music education did you like, have prior to serving? You said high school band?

D: High school band. Church choir as a kid in the kids choir at church, but that was only up until I think it was seventh grade. Um that's, that's basically it.

J: And then you said in the army, you went to AIT at Little Creek? And then you went to you said Ithaca College afterwards. And then any other musical education at all?

D: I think no, just being embedded with different groups, you know, playing with different orchestras or I learned a lot playing with the shape of band playing all the jazz. But I had, I forgot I did have some jazz experience. During my high school years. It wasn't with a teacher, but there was a small group that was put together by a young man in the area, and the group was called saints and sinners and so we played a bunch of Dixie land and, and easy jazz pieces. In fact, for one, one or two rehearsals, we had a young man come in and play with us, amazing trombone player. And come to find out he did stick with his trombone. And he was with the, the trombonist with the Empire Brass Quintet for a number of years. But he was, I remember when he came in, I mean, he was little, little kid carrying a big trombone. Here. I was in high school, and he was he was probably maybe seventh grade, eighth grade. But boy, Could he play? And he kept on playing. So that wasn't, that wasn't an education. It wasn't an education with a teacher. Not a class or individual instruction, but it was just learning. Learning to play.

J: And what groups have you been in since the army or performing now? Any ones that stick out?

D: I'm not playing with anybody. It's terrible. I do sing with the church choir and sing with a community chorale. That's sponsored by the Hobart William Smith Colleges. And what's especially nice about that group is that each year, they get a different instructor and the instructor is a doctoral student in choral conducting from Eastman just up the road. It's so it ends up being a win win. So here's this student who's in a doctoral program who has an actual choir to work with. We are a community choir, and it's not an audition.

J: How many of the WAC band reunions have you attended?



D: I attended all the WAC band reunions since they started back in. What was it? 2002 2002? I think that was the first one. I'm not sure. The first reunion I went to was, it was part of the Women's Army Corps reunion every I don't know how often, they'd have a Women's Army Corps reunion at Fort McClellan. But I mean, it wasn't just the band. It was the Women's Army Corps. So you know, they'd have well, I'm not sure what all they did, because this is the only one I went to. They were specially honoring the Women's Army Corps bands. And that was in 1990. And that was 1996. Yeah, it was neat. It just worked out. I mean, I was still an active duty member at that time, but I was in at Fort Hood, Texas. I asked to, to be able to, to go and they said, Yeah, sure.

J: That's great.

D: Jeannie pace was in Texas at the time. I think. Yeah, I think she's a commander. Hmm. I can't remember what she was doing at the time. Okay, but she was there too. Yep. And of course, Dixie. Dixie lived in Fort McClellan at the time. Okay. A bunch of WAC band members were there. And I found out that reunion too, that the, the usual plan was whenever there was a Women's Army Corps Band reunion, the Women's Army Corps, just the Corps, that the band folks would get together and usually just hang out at Dixie sales for the for the time that Oh, that's fun. Yeah. And then they made the actual like formal band reunions right after that started, I think primarily because they stopped having Women's Army Corps reunions at Fort McClellan because you know, closed up shop and it was no longer the WAC and well hadn't been the WAC center or school but it things changed and the museum, the Women's Army Corps Band, Women's Army Corps Museum moved to the DC area. Okay, so it used to be they'd all come to Fort McClellan and look through the museum. That was part of the thing.

J: What's your favorite parts of going to the reunions?

D: Seeing people that I know and meeting, meeting new people to well, like you.

J: I think that's pretty much it for my like formal questions, but if there's anything else you can think of WAC band related or music ed?

D: As a beginning French horn player, I was very disappointed with how I sounded all the time. And I said, Oh, I'm not making any progress it sounds so bad. It's horrible. And I told my mom I wanted to stop. But all my mom was so smart. She said Deborah, if you stick with it, you're not going to regret it. She said, and when I was in school, my very, very best friends were in the band. She said, you're gonna love it. She said, it's hard to begin with, but you stick with it, and it'll be fine. And she was right. Without her encouragement, there's no way I could have done it. And I know that not all students have parents like that. They say, Oh, you want to quit? Okay, go ahead.

D: So if there's any other questions that come up, and or, or when you're looking through or looking at are looking and listening again to the record. Wait, what did she mean by that? I

mean, I'm, I'm I'm always available.

J: Oh, thank you so much.

D: You are welcome.

J: I'll definitely send you a copy of the finished piece when it's all said and done. I've got quite a bit of work ahead of me.

D: Oh, yeah. Well keep it up. And I'm glad you're out there working with kids. That is that is so important. I enjoy doing that so much. After I retired I stayed in Texas, I was at Fort Hood, Texas when I retired. And I decided to stay in the area mainly because my, my sister and her family were just an hour down the road in Austin. And, and she had two little boys and I couldn't leave my nephews, didn't have to live in their backyard. But I couldn't be you know, coming back here to upstate New York, right? Too far away from Texas and boys. Oh, I ended up being given the opportunity to be an assistant band director at the middle school in temple Texas. But it did not work out. I had lost too many of my woodwind skills. And my crowd control skills for middle schoolers was not up to par

### **Kelly Interview**

J: Okay, so, when did you enlist?

K: I went delayed entry on July 14 of 1978. About seven to eight weeks after I graduated high school.

J: Oh, okay.

K: So at age 18. And I went active on September 5<sup>th</sup>, it was actually Labor Day that year. And you know what, it felt so good. Because every year we start school right after Labor Day. So yeah, I'm gonna start the Army.

J: So did you go into basic training right away? Or did you wait a little while?

K: I went September.

J: Oh, so you went September? Okay. Got it. So that's when you went to basic. Where did you go to basic Training? Did you go to the WAC Training Center?

K: Yeah, I went to the last WAC bootcamp, Basic Training Unit we were at. In fact, general Clarke, who was the first female general in the army, got her second star at our graduation, because we were the last WAC cycle. That was it, everything integrated after the after our cycle, they were already starting to integrate after our cycle. And we started in September. So

that's why if you look on the things they'll say September 19, September, November 1978, which was our cycle. We graduated on November 2 of 1978.

J: Okay. Yeah, yeah. And how long did you serve?

K: I stayed active until November 20 of 1987. Okay. And then I was active reserves the very next day. Until January of 2008.

J: So you did the full 20 years?

K: Yeah, I actually had 29 years, seven months, and seven days.

J: All right. And why did you enlist? What brought you to enlist?

K: A guy. We were dating and when he was supposed to take me to prom, he left for boot camp. So his recruiter whose name was Jesse James, legitimately, Jesse James, came and talked to me about joining the army. And he said you can be with Jim and I'm like, seriously? You know, if he was going to be a grunt, I was going to go into band. I auditioned for it, but it took me two auditions.

J: Okay. Did you know like, you wanted to go in the band?

K: Yeah, that was part of the thing. Audition, prior to actually raising your right hand. I had already passed an audition. That was one of the requirements. And you went in as a PFC. And then you came through the school of music as a special e4. Okay, and then from there, it just depended on what you played.

J: Can you tell me how long was basic and then how long was the school music?

K: Basic was eight to ten weeks. And then school of music was six months, six months at the school.

J: Okay, and was it the one that's at Little Creek? Little Creek?

K: Virginia Beach.

J: Okay. And did you go straight through those?

K: Yeah. So at nine, nine months in the army, you're graduating school of music. That's when you got your e4. I left there as a specialist four and then two years later because I was a flute player, flute players were under strength, I got my E5, and in five years. I got my E6. Just before I went over to Korea. Which really helps because as an E6, if you had an overnight pass to leave

the base, you as an E6, didn't need to be carrying it over. You didn't need to carry the actual pass. Because you were an E6.

J: Oh, okay. Well, that's good. And do you play any other instruments besides flute?

K: I play a little guitar. I have a six string and I have a keyboard that I am learning.

J: That's excellent. So what role did music play in your decision to enlist? I know the recruiter approached you but like, how did you know that the band was what you want to do?

K: Well, once the recruiter offered it, that was it was the band or I'm not going okay. I'm not gonna go be a cook. And I'm not gonna go be a grunt. I'm gonna be in the band. Or we're gonna do computers.

J: Yeah, for sure. And what, what kind of, like music education to do have growing up?

K: I had private lessons on the flute. Other than that, I just had high school. Middle school, high school.

Okay, that was it. No theory. Well, my private lesson teacher, she had me do these little theory books. So I had some concept of theory, but not like, School of Music

J: And did you have theory or music education when you went to the School of Music? And even like, while you were serving or after you served? Did you have any, like, musical education after that?

K: I went from the school of music to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. At the fort Sheridan band, it took a couple years, but we had Northwestern University came in on Wednesdays and each semester we had a specific class and private lessons. So we were the only active duty Army band that had college day as part of our duty. You know, everybody had to participate. They just made it mandatory. You were gonna take private lessons. Yeah, there is, you know, professors, directors, and then we had classes like arranging and theory and some other, you know, brass technique. Whoever we could get, we had a choice, they give us two or three options. What do you want this semester, and then we would get it and then the instructor would come to us at the base, and teach us all on Wednesdays. So that kept the music education going, which was great. I mean, I don't know where they got the funding, right other than for charity was the Army's biggest political retirement base. But it was a little tiny land post, I mean, much land there other than it's right there on Lake Michigan, right. So, but then after I got out of I left, in 87, I left the Chicago 88 I left the Chicago area, went to Cincinnati briefly was within the hundred division reserve, who hadn't had a flute or piccolo player and over 10 years, so they loved having Stars and Stripes actually be played by piccolo instead of the trombones whistling. But then I got a car accident. And I ended up having to come up here to Detroit. And that was in 1990. And I started at Western in 1993. Okay, and then I graduated in 98. Okay, but I had to change majors because of that flute professor that said that she didn't understand how I had enough talent to be in the army. Because I didn't have enough talent there. And it was the black

history professors that caught me after that flute professor told me that and he said, you know, he said Western Michigan University would not give Luther Vandross a music degree either. And it didn't stop him. And this professor told me, he said, he said, you may not be doing it right now. You may have to kind of meet with a mold right now. He said, But you pursue what you need to pursue. Stay you. You know, I mean, he just gave me that. Yeah, that is broke, man. You've used up almost all your government funds for school, right? And then you tell me, okay, so I did recreation. It wasn't therapeutic recreation. But I was able to do my internship out of the VA hospital in recreation therapy. And music therapy was part of recreation therapy. So I got to do a whole semester internship out there, and I absolutely loved it. And when I went out there to get hired in that, it was my goal was to get into music therapy. And they, you know, they would have hired me to except I got into housekeeping and they never let me leave, so I got stuck there now. I applied for multiple jobs, some in music therapy, recreation and secretaries and accountants and yeah, apply and logistics. And no, no. Got plenty of interviews. 13 years out there and they still don't know. Happy to do just what I'm doing right. 19 bucks an hour plus benefits works for me.

J: Yeah. And now you play in the community band here?

K: I just started last Monday with cereal city concert band.

J: Oh, I love it. Was the Fort Sheridan band integrated then when you got there?

K: Yeah. In fact, Fort Sheridan band used to be the Fifth Army Band, which was out of Texas and actually originated from Puerto Rico was active during World War Two. And then they deactivated the Fifth Army Band and made it the 81st Army Band. And then they deactivated the 81st Army Band and made it the Fourth Army Band. Oh, and then they deactivated the whole base. That was still reserve units that are down there.

J: That really kind of wraps it up for my questions- they are pretty short and sweet. But just anything else you want to say? I know you're looking forward to going to the WAC band reunion.

K: I've just been following them mostly on Facebook. Okay, so this WAC veteran put on the WAC Facebook page that she had this really old flute that was under her bed and she wasn't playing it anymore. And she just wanted to give it away and who would be interested in it. And I was like, I'm interested. So she lived out in California. I still have the box that it came in- it came in a big glass display box. Also very, very, very old. Well, this flute is from the Civil War. Yeah, there is not a single marking on it to show who made it. There's no serial number. You know, like some of them they would put little notches certain letters, maybe. Yeah, there is nothing this guy can't find anything. But he said Kelly it's definitely in the Civil War era and it's to a place where this woman would not take any money. So I sent her a gift card for I think it was Applebee's afterwards because she paid the shipping and everything. And then that and I that was around Easter time of that year. And then a couple months later she died. She was basically cleaning and thought, here I got a flute. Yeah, I have an old antique Civil War era flute. Right,

who wants it? Oh, I'll send it to you. It's just that camaraderie and that, you know, all those shared experiences, I think, and I did not know her. Yeah, she did not know me.

## APPENDIX B

### Structured Questions Results

#### Q1 - What is your name?

What is your name?

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Blanche

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Susie

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Diane

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Patty

---

Gail

---

Ann

---

Pauline

---

Lori

#### Q2 - When did you enlist in the Army?

When did you enlist in the Army?

---

mid-1960's. I'd have to dig out my old documents. I do have access to them.

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1967

---

5 April 73

---

June 1970

---

1969 oct

---

02/70

---

28 Oct 71

---

Sep67

#### Q3 - How long did you serve?

How long did you serve?

---

Slightly less than 2 years.

---

6 1/2 full time in the Womens Army Corp Band. 15 yrs in Air National Guard Band

21 years

---

3 years in wac band and then army reserves in my home state of Montana

---

3 yrs active 4 reserves

---

4yrs 4mos

---

29 Years , two months, and two days

---

4 years active, 4 years Reserve

#### **Q4 - Why did you enlist?**

Why did you enlist?

---

It was not my idea at first. I was happily engaged in my college life as a music major and had just completed my sophomore year. I had just been awarded my college's Charles Falhaber Award for the Most Outstanding Musician of the Year and had been featured soloist with the college band. I was home for the summer to play in what was then a very active semi-professional orchestra in my city - LaCrosse, Wisconsin. My mother had either heard the WAC band or had heard about it. She was not a person to be disobeyed and she was insisting. She made an appointment at the recruiting office and I complied by going for my interview.

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Yes

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I needed three hots and a cot. Parents said I needed a job with medical dental and a place to live by age 18 and HS graduate.

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G. I. Bill

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To be a trumpet player in womens Army band

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To play music

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Many reasons, I always wanted to be a WAC, follow in my Dad's footsteps, join my friend in Viet Nam, recommendation of the conservatories if I wanted to pursue a degree in performance in music since this was extremely hard field to get into as a woman

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To play in the WAC Band

#### **Q5 - What role did music play in your decision to enlist?**

What role did music play in your decision to enlist?

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This was the critical factor. I would never have left civilian life were it that had meant not playing my instrument.

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None. I went in for communications. If it was not for the fact that all women enlisted who had any musical experience had to audition for the 14th Army WAC band



It was the only opportunity for a HS musician who could not afford college to make a living playing music.

None. Wanted to be a medic

I loved music and wanted GI Bill

????? Play music

Didn't play a big part in why I enlisted, but played a huge part in why I stayed.

The only reason that I enlisted.

### Q6 - What instrument(s) do you play?

What instrument(s) do you play?

I am a French hornist. I do play other instruments and actually ended up playing tuba in the WAC Band. My audition on horn was good and I would have been selected on that instrument were it not for the fact that there was no open slot for a horn player. So, I asked to audition on other instruments. I play horn at the reunion concerts.

Trombone

Clarinet, Alto and Tenor Sax, Flute, Drums, Bass Clarinet.

Tuba

Trumpet

Percussion

Primary Flute/Piccolo additional Piano and percussion

Euphonium

### Q7 - How many WAC Band reunions have you attended?

How many WAC Band reunions have you attended?

Two. I will probably attend next fall's reunion if possible,

10 at least

2

4

6 years

About 5

One because health reasons prevent me from going.

Five

### **Q8 - What was your music education prior to serving in the Army?**

What was your music education prior to serving in the Army?

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I had just completed my sophomore year in college as a music literature major. My interest was in becoming a performer. I had never had lessons on my instrument before college, but had self-taught to the point that I was a Musicians Union member and a member of Two very fine adult orchestras by the age of 15. I had also earned 4 1st place awards for solo and ensembles performances at the Wisconsin Stage Music Festival in my senior year and one of the judges offered me a scholarship to an out of state school on the spot. I was the student conductor with my high school band and taught its French horn section. I was attending college on a scholarship from the Music Department at U. W. at Stevens Point.

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High school

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Public High School

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High school

---

Grammar and high school

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High School

---

High School was the education

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Three years studying Music Education at Ohio University

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### **Q9 - What was your music education during and after serving in the Army?**

What was your music education during and after serving in the Army?

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I self-taught to develop my playing on tuba, even as I played French horn in my free time. I was not sent to school. There was an attempt to get me sent to the Navy School of Music, but I was discharged before that could happen. I eventually completed a B.MuEd. and later returned to a master's program in French horn performance while on sabbatical, then switched to music education following an accident that injured my upper lip. I did complete other (non-music) degrees eventually, too, and worked in those fields for some time, but then returned to music teaching. At age 77, I just resigned a month ago from my public-school music teaching position and immediately started my new position as an adjunct professor in the music department of our local college.

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After I got out of the Army, I earned a Bachelor in music education and a Masters in Music performance

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Night College classes in Music Theory, Conducting and Saxophone

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None actual schooling during army but hours and hours of rehearsals, concerts and parades. After army, I was in Montana state marching band but gave up on my minor in music and got degree in teaching

---

Continued to play taps buglers across American and taps for veterans

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Studied with Jack Bell, principal percussionist of the Atlanta Symphony during service. Percussion performance major for a couple years, but changed major due to focal dystopia in left arm that started while I was in the WAC Band.

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High School and some college

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See above. Eventually earned MA in Musicology in 2008.