

USAF BAND OF THE GOLDEN WEST



LINEAGE

STATIONS

Travis AFB, CA

ASSIGNMENTS

22nd Air Refueling Wing
722nd Air Refueling Wing
Air Mobility Command

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The United States Air Force Band of the Golden West received its current name on 1 May 1997. The band's history dates back to 1941 and throughout the intervening decades it was known as "15th Air Force Band of the Golden West", "Air Mobility Command Band of the Golden West", "America's Band in Blue" and "504th Air Force Band of the Golden Gate".

The US Air Force Band of the Golden West has two proud parents: the 15th Air Force and the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD).

The "15th Air Force Band of the Golden West", originally called "The Air Force Band", was activated on 1 October 1941 at Scott Field, IL. In 1944, from Scott Field the band moved to Camp Shanks, NY before heading to war-torn Europe. The band was re-designated as the "523 Army Air Force Band" and stationed at Le Havre, France and Warton, England (1945). After the war, the band returned stateside to Camp Patrick Henry, VA, and was inactivated on 13 December 1945. On 26 September 1947, just 8 days after the creation of the United States Air Force as a separate branch of military service, the inactive band was re-designated the "523rd Air Force Band". On 1 December 1952, the band was placed under Strategic Air Command at March Air Force Base, CA. On 1 May 1965 it was assigned to 15th Air Force and became known as the "15th Air Force Band". In 1991 the band was officially re-designated as the "15th Air Force Band of the Golden West" and in 1994 it became known as the "Air Mobility Command Band of the Golden West", when it merged with "America's Band in Blue" at Travis AFB.

"America's Band in Blue" has its own unique history and heritage. In 1959, it comprised the Air Force component of the "NORAD Command Band". During this time, the band made numerous radio broadcasts and television appearances including the "Today Show", the "Tonight Show" and the "Dinah Shore Show". In 1979, the band was re-designated the "504th Air Force Band of the Golden Gate" and moved to Travis Air Force Base, CA. In 1991 it was re-designated as "America's Band in Blue". On 1 July 1994 the band was inactivated with all personnel and equipment reassigned to the "Air Mobility Command Band of the Golden West" at Travis Air Force Base, CA and becoming the only active duty Air Force band west of the Rockies. Changing its name to the "United States Air Force Band of the Golden West" on 1 May 1997, this 47-member organization continues to maintain its rich heritage of musical excellence and outstanding Air Force professionalism in over 500 annual performances throughout the western states of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Nevada.

On April 15, 1959, Colonel Barney Oldfield organized the NORAD Band: a 90-member unit drawn from US Army, US Air Force, US Navy, and Royal Canadian Air Force enlisted bandmen. It was the only international, inter-service band ever in existence. The band premiered in Albuquerque, NM, and then set out on its first tour in the Pacific Northwest.

On the road, a NORAD Band Concert was the "Cavalcade of Music" with a focus on custom arrangements of show tunes and medleys. The band was in high demand and had appearances at the Canadian National Exhibition, the Michigan State Fair, and annual appearances at New York's Carnegie Hall. It also shot television spots on the Bell Telephone Hour and the Dinah Shore Show, culminating wit!" an appearance on the Steve Allen Show in May 1960. In that year the American Federation of Musicians named the NORAD Band the "Honorary Best Band" at the annual Best Bands contest in Detroit.

In December 1964, Lieutenant Colonel Victor J. Molzer took over as director of the band, and in 1965. Captain Con Furey of the Canadian Armed Forces took up duties as assistant musical director. With a binational leadership, the NORAD Band continued a string of high-profile appearances for the command including Mexico City, the Hollywood Bowl, the New York's World Fair, Guatemala, EXPO 67 in Montreal. Iceland, the Mike Douglas Show, the Today Show, and the Tonight Show.

The Cavalcade also featured "The NORAD Commanders" jazz band. The Commanders' alumni list reads like a veritable "who's who" of successful musicians including Bobby Shew, Mike Whited, Bill Prince, Phil Wilson, Bobby Harriott, Warren Luening, Pete Rosa, Jerry Ash, Johnnie Zell, Richard Maloof, Kenny Kotwitz, Steve Bohannon, Jerry DeDad, Randy Aldcroft, Mike Brumbaugh, Clay Brandt, Jerry Liliedahl. Dave Wolpe, Larry Ford, Jim Straggari, Dave Edwards, Fred Hamilton, and Rick DrUmm.

Off the road, the NORAD Band lived in a small barracks at Peterson Field, the airfield of Ent Air Force Base. The barracks were across from the rehearsal hall, which was conveniently located next to the NCC Club. One bandsman remembered that the club allowed the band to gather there "because they were such GREAT customers!!" NORAD band members were active on the local music scene with jam sessions at the "Cellar" in Manitou Springs and the "Emporium" in Colorado Springs. The band also recorded a number of albums including Playback, About Faces, The NORAD Cavalcade of Music from Carnegie Hall, NORAD Night at Carnegie Hall, Exciting Sounds, Music from NORAD, and Ballads and Brass.

The NORAD Band was retired in 1979 as each of the component bands went back to its respective service. The Air Force component was re-designated the 504th Air Force Band of the Golden Gate and moved to Travis Air Force Base, CA. It continues to perform as the United States Air Force Band of the Golden West. So the legacy of the NORAD Band, the "Cavalcade of Music," remains with us still.

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Sources