


Connecticut Hurricanes

by Bill Flaker

Drum corps records will show that the Connecticut Hurricanes Senior Drum and Bugle Corps originated in 1955. However, it was back in 1932 that the roots of the corps actually took place.

The John H. Collins Post Fife, Drum and Bugle Corps started with a donation of six fifes, four snares and one bass drum by Walter H. De Forest. The first members included Wes Anderson, Frank Coss, Ginger D'Auto, John Sparo, Hector Scarpa, Vinny Liqui, Mauri Ring, Bill Bailey, George Biancarelli, the Kelly brothers and Harvey Olderman.

The uniform of the day was a Legion outfit that actually changed to

was a member of the board of directors for more than a decade. He believed that drum corps was originally formed to honor veterans and that every show needed a color presentation and respect to the flag.

The uniform of the original Hurricanes consisted of a blue military jacket with white piping, gray pants and a blue shako with a white plume. The signature lightning bolt did not come in until 1958 when the corps changed to black uniforms.

The Hurcs began life in the Northeast Circuit and stormed off the line playing *Moon Over Miami*, *Thunder March* and *Lime House Blues*. Oscar Nabling was the music arranger and horn instructor, while the drum line was in the hands of Buddy Ogle.

Marching and maneuvering came under the direction of Vinny Ratford. The corps was based out of Derby, CT, and consisted of 38 members.

In the 1960s, the corps began to rise to the top of the drum corps activity. In 1962 and 1963, they were champions of the Northeast Circuit. In 1964, the Hurcs captured the Connecticut State Championship as well as their first major title at the World Open held at Hedges Stadium in Bridgeport, CT. The New York Skyliners took preliminary honors, but the tenacity of the Hurricanes blew past the Skyliners in the finals by a winning margin of .083.

Led onto the field by Drum Major Joe Genero, the repertoire consisted of an opening fanfare of *The Man I Love*, followed by an off the line of *Hello Dolly* and a color presentation of *Under the Double Eagle*. The concert number was *Tropical Heat Wave* with Art Hlywa on lead solo followed by

blue and gray in 1937. This corps traveled to wherever the American Legion Convention was being held.

The first songs played, *Semper Fidelis* and *Thunder March*, were written on a white window shade. Mauri Ring was the instructor and the drum major was Oscar Nabling.

The corps remained a fife, drum and bugle corps until 1949 when they dropped *fife* from their title. That year, the corps traveled to Miami Beach, FL, for their annual convention trip.

Rumor has it that a lovely young woman happened upon the corps and was asked what she thought of the group. Her response was, "You're louder than a Hurricane!" and that is when this group of men first began to regard themselves as the Hurricanes.

In 1954, the group took part in the Forty and Eight Parade in St. Louis, MO. This event recognized how 40 horses and eight men were transported by railway during WWI.

For 1955, Gene Imperatto went to the capital city of Hartford and incorporated the drum corps and thus became the group known as the Connecticut Hurricanes. The name was also adapted after Hurricane Diana ravaged much of southern New England the same year.

Imperatto went on to become the corps' quartermaster as well as its president and he



The Hurricanes in 1955 (photo from the collection of the Connecticut Hurricanes).

Magnificent Seven and *Caravan*, with an exit number of *Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home*.

The Hurricanes finished the 1964 campaign with five firsts, three seconds and one fourth place. Horn arrangements and instruction were under the leadership of Genero, with the drum line under the guidance of Don Freising and drill instruction by Ed Condon and Bob Woods.

The uniform consisted of a white satin blouse with a lime green sequined sash, black pants with a one and a half inch white stripe with green piping, white shoes and the traditional Hurricane "police" hat.

The 1964 season was the first for the Drum Corps Associates organization and

(Top to bottom) The Hurricanes' drum major, Joe Genero, in 1967 (photo by Bob Hunter); a rotating company front in approximately 1972 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World); the Hurricanes in 1954; the corps' famous lightning bolt (photos from the collection of the Connecticut Hurricanes).



while there was no championship contest, the end of the year ratings had the New York Skyliners and Hurricanes locked in a tie for the top position.

On July 4, 1964, the Skyliners edged the Hurcs by .014 at the Barnum Festival, with the Hurcs taking top honors in horns, marching and general effect. A note of interest in this show was that the Hawthorne Caballeros were asked not to compete as a result of a boycott by the other participating corps, all DCA members. The Caballeros were not yet a member of the group. Also among the Hurricanes appearances that year was a concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

The Hurricanes followed the success of



The Hurricanes at the 1967 American Legion Nationals in Boston, MA (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Syracuse contest, which was the second of only two losses suffered by the Hurcs that year. The corps earned nine show titles, took top honors at Mission Drums, Barnum

Festival and the National Dream contest and earned American Legion National Champion and DCA World Champion titles. The show

opened with a fanfare of *The Man I Love*, an off the line of *Start Each Day Off With a Song* and *One of Those Songs*. The color presentation was a medley of *National Emblem March*, *Of Thee I Sing* and *Under the Double Eagle*. The concert number was *Rhapsody in Blue* and a production number of *Fiddler on the Roof*. The exit was the signature *Return of the Magnificent Seven* and the corps closed with *Stormy Weather*.

Also for the record, the corps' trademark song, *Magnificent Seven*, was first played in 1961 and has been used every year since. Of note in the 1967 season was that the only two losses the Hurcs suffered were at the hands of the Reading Buccaneers, because in 1968 the only two losses suffered by the Bucs were to -- who else? -- the Connecticut Hurricanes!

Winning the National Dream contest was the highlight of the 1968 campaign as the Hurricanes finished first four times, second four times and third once. A disappointing sixth place at DCA Finals had the corps four full points behind the Buccaneers.

The summer of 1969 was a new year with a new desire to reclaim the world title. Genero and Ray Luedee led the horns and drums, respectively, with Bobby Daniels as the marching caption head. The off the line of *Queen of Sheba March* led into a strong *Hallelujah Chorus* and was followed by *Rhapsody In Blue* as a concert number. A jazz version of *Walk On the Wild Side* gave way to the signature *Hang 'em High* and *Magnificent Seven*, which was presented in a company front 60 yards across the front sideline that

never failed to get a standing ovation from crowds. The finale of *2001 A Space Odyssey* closed out this fabulous show.

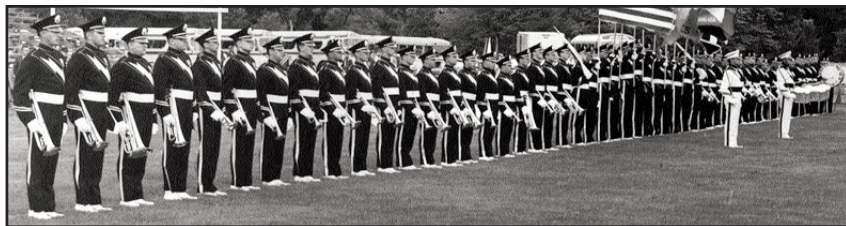
After a slow start with no victories in the first four shows, things turned around dramatically after a victory in Altoona, PA. The next week the Hurricanes won the National Dream for the third consecutive year and never looked back at the field of competitors. They finished the season as DCA

World Champions by defeating the New York Skyliners 79.475 to 78.275.

And so ended the 1960s, where the Hurricanes compiled an astonishing record. Of 104 competitions the corps entered from 1960 to 1969, they took first place 52 times, winning 50 percent of their contests. In addition, they placed second 22 times and third 11 times. That is an amazing 82 percent rate of placing in the top three for all shows during that period.

The 1970s were successful, but also disappointing, as no DCA titles were achieved. The corps did, however, place in the top 10 throughout the decade, with the highest finish at finals being third in 1970 and 1973 and the lowest finish being eighth in 1977.

Following the 1976 season, the corps was



The Hurricanes in 1959 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of the Connecticut Hurricanes).

1964 with an excellent 1965 season by winning six shows, placing second three times and third once. The Reading Buccaneers took top honors at the first DCA Championships by .26 over the Hurricanes.

The 1966 season was much the same as the previous year, as the corps placed first nine times, second four times and third once. A disappointing second-place finish at DCA Finals to the New York Skyliners by a mere .13 of a point only refueled the fire to regain the top spot in 1967.

The 1967 season was one of corps' most successful in its long history. The year did not start off well, as attendance was spotty all winter and got worse as the drill was starting to be learned. Some rehearsals were called off due to poor attendance. A pep talk by some of the corps' instructors in March served as a wake-up call to all its members as the corps responded with six straight victories to open the season before being stopped by the Reading Buccaneers.

Reading was again victorious at the



(Above) The Hurricanes in 1979 (photo by Ed Ferguson from the collection of Drum Corps World); (below) the Hurricanes on June 5, 1976 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of DCW).



The Hurricanes on June 16, 1973 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).



faced with what was thought at the time to be very tough decisions to make. Two main issues were brought to the forefront. One was the corps facing a decline in membership as its nucleus was shrinking.

Many of the standard bearers and warhorses of the 1960s and 1970s had reached time to retire. Second was the evolution of the color guard now being a major element of the corps' overall presentation. The days of holding the flag and being used in pictures were now gone and a new generation of color guard had taken over. Choreography, dancing, twirling and a wide variety of props were now being used. Women were best suited to anchor the guard and help the corps keep pace with the changing times.

Human nature and macho pride make it easy to resist change. Fortunately, logic prevailed and in November 1976 the decision was reached to allow female members into the corps. They were the second corps in DCA to reach this decision, after the Sunrisers.

The first female member of the new guard was Joan Mullen Londona. She was followed by 22 other talented members. The first uniform of the new guard consisted of black riding boots, black gaucho pants, black blouse, lime green sequin cummerbund and a black Aussie hat with a white plume.

These women quickly adapted to the standards and rigors of life as a Hurricane and pumped new life back into the corps. Nancy Moynihan, Marie Kane, Laura Florentino, Dodie Wynne, Ellen Stacy, Debbie MacLennan, Mary Bennett, Lauren Sette Yagavone, Laurie Cassidy, Ellen Niezelski, Terry Sekellick Hunter, Heidi King, Jane Bologna, Paula Yankowich, Donna Kearney, Diane MacLennan, Chris Sokel Bradley, Leida Golder, Fran Kulpowich and Brenda Curran were the original members of the female color guard.

The 1980s was a decade of peaks and valleys for the corps. A solid third-place finish at DCA Finals in 1980 was followed by the corps winning the DCA crown in 1981 at Franklin Field in Philadelphia, PA. They defeated the Sunrisers. In 1986 and in 1989, the corps failed to make the top 10 at finals for the first times in its history.

Being back in the top 10 at DCA Finals in 1990 started a new burst of energy. Between 1991 and 1995, the Hurcs were in the top five at DCA Championships each year. In 1991, the traditional-type show was thrown out and replaced with a theme-type program by show coordinator Mickey Kelly.

The program was based on "Sorcery and Witchcraft" and was portrayed in different musical and visual idioms. The drill was written by Dave Brubaker and created movements to the music, such as the soprano line marching in front on a diagonal, playing with one hand, while the other arm was swinging to the beat.

The corps placed in the top 10 at DCA



The Hurricanes on August 24, 1985 at Montclair, NJ (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Finals each year from 1990 until 1999.

In 1996, at DCA Finals at Frontier Field in Rochester, NY, a power failure hit the stadium as the full retreat ceremony was beginning. The Reading Buccaneers played and marched out of the stadium with the field in total darkness, as they were the first corps to exit in retreat.

Next out was the Hurricanes. Drum corps fans who were in attendance started unison clapping as the Hurcs' contra line started the opening strains of *Magnificent Seven* and by the time the corps hit the front sidelines with Al DeSantis on the oversized cymbals and Rich Yelnick on screaming soprano solo, the lights were fully on and the fans were up on their feet for the Hurricanes. That was a real drum corps moment to see.

Percussion has been a strong point for the Hurricanes since their inception. The street cadence familiar to drum corps fans is titled *Downfall* and has been used for more than 25 years. Legend has it that in early 1970, instructor Ray Luedee was preparing the drum line at a competition.

John Flowers of the Buccaneers passed by and commented to Luedee that the Hurcs' drum line was looking tough to beat.

Luedee's response was, "They are good and they'll be your downfall."

John Bodnar, the corps' assistant drum line instructor, took this as an inspiration to arrange *Downfall of Paris* as the new drum beat. For many years ancient drum corps were known to have used this piece of

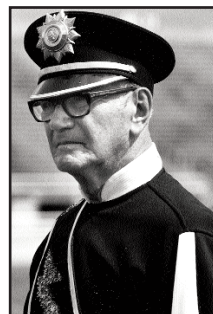


The Hurricanes at Montclair, NJ, on July 22, 1990 (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).

music. Luedee's drum lines won six top percussion awards at DCA World Championships between 1965 and 1972. These lines also won high honors at the senior World Open, American Legion Nationals and National Dream contests.

Six members of the Connecticut Hurricanes have been inducted into the World Drum Corps Hall of Fame as full

members because of their dedication to the corps and to the drum corps community. Harvey Olderman was



Harvey Olderman at Hershey, PA, in 1979 (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).



The Hurricanes on August 30, 1997 at the DCA Championship Prelims (photo by David Rice from the collection of Drum Corps World).

an original member of the John H. Collins Fife, Drum and Bugle Corps. He was a fife player in the original group and went on to become honor guard captain for the Hurricanes.

Olderman marched competitively with the corps until the age of 86! He is still believed to be the oldest member of any drum corps to march in competition. Olderman was inducted into the Hall in 1976 as a charter member.

Robert Findley was inducted in 1987 and is currently on the board of directors for the corps. He joined in 1967 as a bass drummer, then drum major and color guard captain during his years of competition. He is also a charter member of the Hurricanes Hall of Fame as well as the Rhode Island Matadors Hall of Fame.

Joe Genero joined the corps in 1956 and served as drum major and brass arranger and instructor. He

is well-noted for his writing and earned the nickname of "Jumpin' Joe" due to his conducting style and skills while leading the corps. Genero was inducted in 1978 and is still involved with the corps.

Pepe Notaro started his drum corps career with the New York Skyliners and later joined the Hurricanes as horn instructor and drum major. He is well-remembered for his French horn solos and his love of the activity. He entered the World Drum Corps Hall of Fame in 1983.

Robert Glovna was a soprano player in the mid-1960s and served as corps director from 1970 until 1976. He also served as vice president of Drum Corps Associates for a number of years. He was inducted in 1979.

In July 2002, Ray Luedee was elected to the Hall of Fame posthumously since serving as the Hurcs' percussion arranger, caption head and snare line member after joining the corps in 1963. He served in these capacities until his passing in 1981. He was the Connecticut State Individual Snare Drum Champion for six consecutive years.

World Drum Corps Hall of Fame associate members of the Connecticut Hurricanes include Robert Bradley, Art Hlywa, John "Cupcakes" Curran, Tony DeFrancesco, Bob Daniels and Doug Oravez.

In May 1993, the Hurricanes organized a Hall of Fame to honor members and supporters for their service to the corps. In addition to the aforementioned individuals, the following are included in this group: George Biancarelli, Brenda Curran, William Duquette, John J. Glynn, Charles King, Rich Mastriani, Robert Woods, Vic Kulinski Jr., Joseph Nicholson, Terry Sekellick, Doug Younkin, Edward Condon, Al DeSantis, John Gore and Hunter Robert Smith.

Identities of the Hurricanes mandated in the bylaws include *Downfall of Paris* as the street beat, the lightning bolt as a part of the corps uniform, *Magnificent Seven* as the corps' theme song and the corps colors as green, black and white.

Consistency, professional excellence and genuine entertaining and fan-friendly shows have been the traditions of the Hurricanes from their inception to the glory days of the 1960s when the corps' name and championships went hand in hand. Through the years since competitive drum corps began, the Hurricanes have been known for their dedication and "never-give-up" attitude as they strive for perfection each and every season.

As an original member of Drum Corps Associates, the Hurricanes have appeared in 36 senior world championships. Senior drum corps

fans who have followed the activity for many years have to feel proud in the sense that senior drum corps is still alive and well as we enter this new century. Corps such as the Connecticut Hurricanes will do all they can to continue to keep the activity healthy, successful and alive.

It has been a pleasure and an honor to enter the Connecticut Hurricanes as part of the drum corps history book. The following individuals are to be thanked for their input and memories that went into this history: Bernie Malesky, Bill Saunders, Art Hlywa, Bob Findley, Rich Tardie, Vince Bruni, Michael Petrone and especially John Fisher who provided much of the written historical information.



Bill Flaker was with the Royal Lancers in Cape Coral, FL, from 1979 until 1987 as a marching, visual and show design consultant. He was a

visual consultant for the Central Connecticut State University Marching Band, New Britain, CT, from 1989 until 1991 and



1997 until 2002. He has been a visual judge for Metro Adjudicators Association and Eastern Marching Band Association and a visual caption judge for marching bands and indoor color guards from 1999 until 2001.

Flaker is now a visual judge for the Musical Arts Conference, covering visual captions for marching bands and indoor color guards from 2001 until the present.

He has also been a visual judge for the United States Scholastic Bands Association since 2002 and has written for Drum Corps World since 1997, covering DCA, DCI and alumni corps.

He and his wife, Linda, have three children and 10 grandchildren.

He especially wants to thank his wife who he met in 1967 while she was marching in a drum corps color guard in New Jersey called the Imperial Knights, for her support.

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The Connecticut Hurricanes, 2002, at DCA Prelims in Scranton, PA (photo by Alan Winslow from the collection of Drum Corps World).



The Connecticut Hurricanes on September 5, 1998 at DCA Prelims in Scranton, PA (photo by Alan Winslow from the collection of Drum Corps World).



(Above) The Connecticut Hurricanes, 2000 at DCA Prelims in Scranton, PA (photo by Richard Wersinger from the collection of Drum Corps World); (below) the Hurricanes on June 22, 2002 (photo by David Rice).