
by Ron Schulz

The Phantom Regiment Drum and Bugle Corps has been in existence since 1956. Originating in the "blue collar" community of Rockford, IL, the Regiment is the surviving marching unit in an area where drum and bugle corps have existed since the end of World War I.

Two senior corps, Thomas G. Lawler VFW Post 342 and Walter R. Craig American Legion Post 60, were formed nearly simultaneously by war veteran service clubs. All future Rockford drum corps would owe something to these early pioneering competing units.

While marching styles would change, uniforms would vary and the instruments would evolve as the activity evolved, the common denominator in Rockford drum corps was a blood line that the performers and instructors of one corps would pass on to the next corps. Like the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon lineage, the sons and daughters, mom and dads, aunt and uncles and cousins passed their love of drum corps on to the next generation of Rockford marchers.

Since 1918, Rockford has never been without a drum and bugle corps. Among the notable organizations following the original service club corps were the Eagles Arie 392 Senior Corps (1920-1940 and 1946-1952), the Boy Scouts of America junior corps (1920-1945), the Blackhawks senior corps (1946-1947), the St. Thomas Crusaders junior corps

Phantom Regiment

Phantom Regiment, 1976, Wheeling, IL (photo by Dick Deihl from the collection of Drum Corps World).

(1954-1959) and the Purple Knights junior corps (1959-1967). Alumni from these earlier corps would form the nucleus of the instructors and support staff of the Phantom Regiment.

Perhaps the most influential Rockford corps for the Phantom Regiment was the VFW 342 junior corps (1939-1946). From this corps, the Regiment would derive its original colors (black and

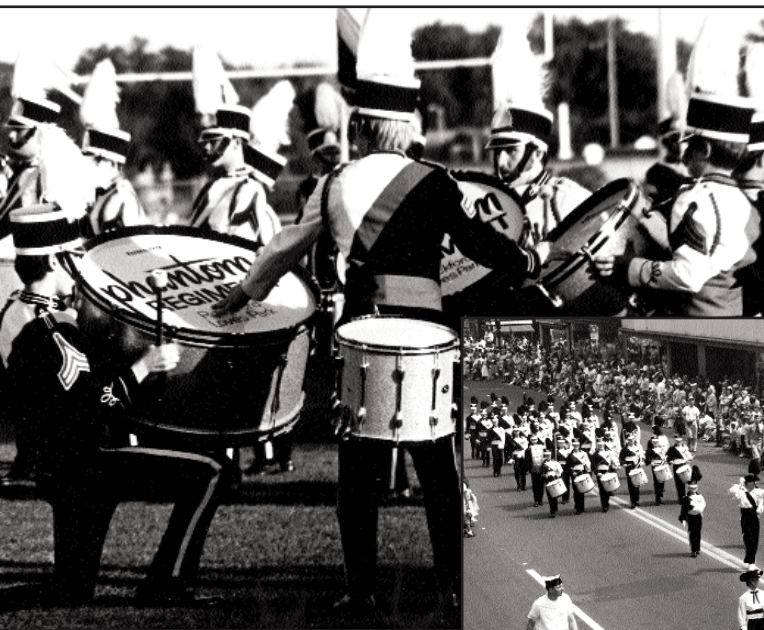
white), integrate its brass and percussion line with both male and female members and feature a strictly female color guard.

Another important corps in the development of the Phantom Regiment was St. Thomas Crusaders. In 1954, Rockford's St. Thomas Catholic High School started a parade corps that evolved from the high school's band program. The Crusaders corps was run by the high school's band moderator, Father Joseph McCarthy, but the instructors were all part of the Rockford drum corps scene from the 1940s, including future Regiment managers Alex Haddad and Dan Dever.

Marching in this corps were future Regiment brass arranger Jim Wren and future Regiment director Dr. Dan Richardson. While St. Thomas' colors were white and purple, the brass and percussion lines were male and female and the guard was female only. By 1956, St. Thomas was competing in area drum and bugle corps competitions.

The same year, Rockford VFW Post 342 once again became interested in sponsoring a competitive junior drum and bugle corps.

The new VFW 342 corps began to take shape in the fall of 1956, with Haddad, Dever, Wayne Shigley, Don Ary, Wilbur Comstock, Bob Kisting and other staff from St. Thomas in charge of getting the corps organized. The new corps was to be called the Rockford Rangers and was to have an all-girl guard called the Rangerettes.



(Clockwise from above) Phantom Regiment, 1961 (photo by Art Luebke); Phantom Regiment at DCI Midwest in Whitewater, WI, 1980 (photo by Eddy Montville); Phantom Regiment, 1958

(photo by Peter McCusker); Phantom Regiment in Cedar Rapids, IA, June 10, 1972 (photo by Paul Jensen, all from the collection of Drum Corps World).





(Left) Phantom Regiment, 1980, at the DCI Championships in Birmingham, AL (photo by Eddy Montville from the collection of Drum Corps World); (above) 1991, DCI Finals in Dallas, TX (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

A number of the members of the Rangers had come from the St. Thomas Crusaders. The name of the corps had become of concern to the members. After listening to some Stetson D. Richmond records, a group of corps members became intrigued with a song that the Syracuse Brigadiers had played titled *The Phantom Regiment* by Leroy Anderson.

After convincing Haddad that a name change was needed -- and before the new corps made any public appearances -- it was officially changed to the Phantom Regiment and the guard's name was changed to the

another Rockford drum and bugle corps.

The Phantomettes quickly established themselves as a contender in the Midwest color guard circuit. The attention they received occasionally came at the expense of the corps itself. In 1959, Carrol Ford formed the Purple Knights Drum and Bugle Corps, which used the uniforms that had been worn by the recently disbanded St. Thomas Crusaders. This corps quickly became an in-town rival for the Regiment.

In 1962, the Regiment purchased a set of high quality Holton bugles from the

Commonwealth Edison

Knights of Light Drum and Bugle Corps in Chicago. With the new set of quality instruments and the addition of a new brass arranger Sal Ferrara, the Regiment began to improve competitively.

The new instruments also allowed the organization to develop a feeder corps with the old instruments. The feeder corps was called the Phantom Regiment Cadets.

The next three

years found the Regiment constantly attempting to find the right formula for success and survival. The organization fielded an all-male corps and an all-male color guard in 1963. The experiment did not produce the desired results, so the male/female brass and percussion lines and the all-girl guard returned in 1964.

That year, Regiment changed its look by purchasing a set of military-style uniforms. With a successful recruiting drive and a new look, 1964 was the most successful year for the corps yet.

But the Regiment was facing some setbacks. First of all, the corps was losing the support of the VFW. More and more, Regiment's funding was coming out of the pockets of the people running the corps. Plus, a fire in 1964 took away the corps' rehearsal site and home. The new uniforms suffered greatly from smoke damage.

Even without a sponsor and not having a

Phantom Regiment, 1982 (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).



The Phantom Regiment, 1981, at DCI Midwest in Whitewater, WI (photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Phantomettes.

The early Regiment uniform was a white shirt with a black tie, black pants with a white stripe (from the VFW 342 junior corps) and a black shako with a white plume (a white satin jacket with a black stripe would eventually replace the white shirt). As they began to enter competitions, they found themselves competing for attention within their own organization and competing with



home (not to mention low membership and management difficulties), members attempted to field a corps in 1965, but ended up folding. The equipment and uniforms were sold and the remaining funds were put in an escrow account kept by Haddad.



Phantom Regiment, 1989, at the DCI Championships in Kansas City, MO (photo by Donald Mathis from the collection of Drum Corps World).

The Phantom Regiment story could have ended there, but it didn't. For one thing, the Phantom Regiment Cadets continued to exist. After the Regiment folded, this parade corps changed their name to the Blackhawk Cadets in tribute to Rockford's Blackhawk senior corps (1946-1947) and in the summer of 1967 they were known as the Forest City Rangers.

More importantly, the vision of a national caliber Phantom Regiment was kept alive by a small group of former Regiment members and staff. This group would become a new board of directors for the organization.

On September 11, 1967, they reorganized and incorporated the Phantom Regiment. The newly reorganized corps was now in need of members and instruments. After a mutually beneficial meeting between the new Regiment board and the director of the Forest City Rangers, members and instruments of the Rangers became the new Phantom Regiment.

The new Phantom Regiment was quite a hodge-podge of ages and talents. The uniforms were a bit hodge-podge, as well. The new uniform top was a red windbreaker, and no headgear was worn until the

organization could afford to buy shakos. The instructors were an interesting mix, too. Some, like Wilbur Comstock, were seasoned instructors of the former

Phantom Regiment, 1987, at DCI Championships in Madison, WI (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Regiment. Others, like Jim Wren, were Regiment alumni without a great deal of teaching experience.

It became Wren's role to write the brass arrangements. Haddad was around and occasionally helped instruct marching rehearsals. The first director of the new corps was Don Ary, whose experience with Rockford drum corps dated back to the 1940s.

For the 1968 and most of the 1969 seasons, the Regiment was a parade corps (though the corps performed in one

competition field show in 1969). In 1970, Phantom Regiment returned to a full season of field show competitions. The decade would prove to be one of the most important in the Regiment's history.

The 1970 Phantom Regiment not only



Phantom Regiment, 1991, in Dallas, TX, at the DCI Championships (photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World).

returned to the field, but also resembled the way the Regiment looked when it folded in 1965. New uniforms had been purchased that were like the military uniforms the Regiment wore in their last full year of

competition. But, no matter how they looked, this was not the Regiment from the 1960s. The members were younger in age and they lacked the experience of the corps that folded.

For those Regiment alumni who had hoped this corps could pick up where the Regiment left off five years earlier, there was, no doubt, some



Phantom Regiment, 1992 (photo by Sid Unser from the collection of Drum Corps World).

disappointment. The Regiment's board had a five-year plan to improve every year until placing in the finals at the major drum and bugle corps championship.

The organization accomplished this goal in four years, when they placed eighth in prelims at the DCI World Championships in Ithaca, NY. By then, the corps had become well-known for basing its shows entirely around classical music, a trait that was first explored by the corps in 1972.

In the fall of 1974, a new uniform was conceived that would give the Regiment a new identity. This uniform consisted of long white jackets with a black sash, a two-colored cape with red on the inside and black on the outside, black pants

Phantom Regiment, 1993 (photo by Sid Unser from the collection of Drum Corps World).





(Clockwise from left) Phantom Regiment, 1995 (photo by Sid Unser); 1997 at Lawrence, KS (photo by Orlin Wagner); 2000 at Drums Along the Rockies in Denver, CO (photo by Karen Sunmark); 2001 (photo by Richard Wersinger); 1999, at DCI Championships in Madison, WI (photo by Ron Walloch); 2002, at DCI Championships in Madison, WI (photo by Alan Winslow); 1998, in Hornell, NY (photo by Alan Winslow, all photos from the collection of Drum Corps World).



with props, choreographed battles and dance movements.

In 1987, Phantom Regiment took on a new look. Michael Cesario designed an all-white uniform that was a fresh, new approach to a drum corps-style uniform.

In 1989, the corps leaped to another second-place DCI finish with its show based on *The New World Symphony*. The same year, the Regiment joined the Kansas City Symphony on stage in a performance of *Elsa's Processional to the Cathedral*.

The 1990s proved to be a time of continued success and evolution for Phantom Regiment. In 1995, the corps' uniform changed again; the same style was used, but the color became all black.

The biggest event of the 1990s occurred in 1996 when the goal and dream of everyone ever involved with the Phantom Regiment organization came true: the Regiment tied the Blue Devils to win its first DCI World Championship.

Phantom Regiment continues to survive in Rockford, IL. The community is as "blue collar" as ever and arts organizations throughout the city struggle to make ends meet. Like many drum corps, the Regiment can no longer count on local members to fill the ranks. But, the bloodline with the former Rockford corps is still there within the Regiment's instructional and support staff. The corps changed its look again in 2000, when tan jackets and white pants replaced the all-black uniform. A uniform change will also appear in the 2003 corps. The corps' most popular uniform style, all-white, is returning.

As the originator of "all-symphonic pageantry," Phantom Regiment, under the guidance of current director Pat Seidling, continues to turn its classical style into a unique combination of timeless music and world class drum corps.



Ron Schulz has been involved with the Phantom Regiment since 1961, first as a mascot. His sister and cousin were already members by 1960. He joined the Phantom Regiment Cadets a year later

as a charter member. He stayed with the Cadets until the new Phantom Regiment was formed in 1967, aging out in 1974. He was on the marching staff until the early 1980s.

After working as an instructor for the Cadets during the mid-1980s, he returned to the Regiment in 1986 and has served in many capacities, including director (1986-1988 and 1997), tour director and board member. He has served as president of the alumni association for the past 10 years.

In 1979, he earned a master of arts degree from Southern Illinois University in public visual communication. Employed at Rock Valley College in Rockford since 1981, Schulz serves as the director of technical programs.



with a red stripe and a white pith helmet.

The remainder of the 1970s would be years of rapid advancement. In 1975, the corps placed 10th at DCI, followed in 1976 by placing fourth. In 1977, 1978 and 1979, the Rockford corps placed second each year at DCI. The 1970s were a remarkable success story.

During the early 1980s, the Regiment often based its shows on the works of Tchaikovsky, but its most famous show from this period was from a ballet by Aram Khachaturian titled "Spartacus." The ballet was based on the story of an ancient Roman slave rebellion led by the ballet's namesake.

The Regiment's innovative show included Wren and Marty Hurley's arrangements of Khachaturian's music, while John Brazale's drill told the story, complete

