

# Deployed Army Bands

by Chief Warrant Officer (W-5) John S. Fraser

Army Bands began deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003 and in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in 2004. Currently, four bands are in Iraq, three at the division level and one at the corps level. The 56th Army Band, I Corps Band, from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, is serving as the United States Forces-Iraq band. The 3d Infantry Division Band from Fort Stewart, Georgia, is serving as the U.S. Division-North Band, the 1st Armored Division Band from Wiesbaden, Germany, as the U.S. Division-Center Band, and the 34th Infantry Division Band, Minnesota Army National Guard, as the U.S. Division-South Band. The 34th Infantry Division Band will be replaced by the 1st Infantry Division Band from Fort Riley, Kansas.

In 2004, elements of the 25th Infantry Division Band provided interim band support to U.S. forces in Afghanistan. In 2005, elements of the 10th Mountain Division Band did the same. Army bands have had a permanent presence in Afghanistan in support of OEF since 2006. Leading the way in 2006 was the 10th Mountain Division Band. After 12 months, it was relieved by the 82d Airborne Division Band, which was subsequently relieved in 2008 by the 101st Airborne Division Band. The 82d returned the favor and relieved the 101st in 2009 and is currently on station.

## ***The Army Band Mission***

Army bands in Iraq and Afghanistan have the opportunity to accomplish their core mission: to provide music throughout the spectrum of military operations to instill in our forces the will to fight and win, foster the support of our citizens, and promote our national interests at home and abroad.

Division and corps commanders and band commanders must consider using Army bands in a strategic rather than in an operational or tactical sense. Bands in a forward theater provide morale-support performances for U.S. forces. They also have a unique ability to influence the future of the people and nation to which they are deployed. Army bands can also influence the future relationships among U.S. citizens and the U.S. Government and the citizens and governments of other countries. The number of missed opportunities to employ Army bands in this manner is incalculable. Army bands deploy for one reason: to provide music support for the commander's strategic vision.



*The 1st Armored Division Band performs songs during Operation Iron Tuba for the people of Balad, Iraq. (Photo by SGT Kani Ronningen)*

## **Types of Band Support**

Deployed Army bands provide several different types of support. These include strategic outreach, force support, family support, public diplomacy, community relations, education, and recruiting.

**Strategic outreach.** As strategic outreach, deployed Army Bands provide live music in virtually every genre, including modern rock, rock-and-roll classics, swing, country and western, salsa, martial, classical, traditional Americana, patriotic, and ceremonial music.

**Force support.** Army bands in theater have supported birthday celebrations of the Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force, in addition to the Army's birthday. Deployed Army bands have also supported Army branch celebrations, unit organizational days, and coalition force activities, including the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps [ANZAC] Day and the British Remembrance Day observances. All traditional U.S. holidays are supported in multiple iterations by the various theater commands and organizations. Army band members have even participated in the support of American citizen naturalization ceremonies. Army bands also support memorial ceremonies for fallen comrades.

**Family support.** Through today's advanced technologies, all deployed Army bands contribute to family support. Examples include recording audio and video musical selections to be aired at important events at home station and webcasting Christmas concerts from Iraq in real time.

**Public diplomacy.** Deployed Army bands have provided professional music in support of the embassies of the United States and the United Kingdom at their home sites as well as at their satellite locations. Not only have Army bands directly supported the operational and diplomatic missions of the embassies, but they also have provided morale-support performances for Department of State employees. Army band support of these State Department missions ranges from high-visibility events for dignitaries to quiet, behind-the-scenes events.

**Community relations.** While deployed, Army band members participate in a number of activities that foster the support of the host nation's citizens and promote U.S. national interests. These activities ensure that the future relationships among our citizens, governments, and cultures have memorable and positive foundations. Community outreach can be as sophisticated as advanced music classes at local schools of fine arts or as simple as teaching a handful of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to play recorders.

**Education.** Everything Army bands do is related to education. Not only are they engaged in the music education of host-nation youth and adults, but they also educate their own forces on what the band brings to the fight. All band members should educate leaders on how to use the band's unique capability to directly enhance the mission or, through morale performances, indirectly enhance the mission by rejuvenating the military personnel through music.

**Recruiting.** In a combat theater, recruiting may seem like an unusual mission in an unusual venue. Any Army band leader who has been around a while knows that our forces have much untapped musical talent that goes unnoticed. While bands usually do not actively

recruit in a combat theater, potential Army bandsmen often come to the band leader with interest in the Army band program. This may be due to bands having much more direct contact and interaction with forces in a combat theater than we do in a continental United States garrison environment.



*The 1st Armored Division Band's strategic support mission includes performing for the local community. (Photo by SGT Kani Ronningen)*

### ***Transportation***

Arranging for transportation is a constant mission challenge. With the exception of bugler support for memorial ceremonies, routine band missions are a low priority for aviation assets. Traveling by airplane is generally not a problem. However, traveling by helicopter or ground transportation can be a significant logistics challenge.

Army band members would like to take everything they own on every mission, but when using helicopters and even some ground transportation, the load must be kept small and light. Fifteen hundred pounds of equipment is about the limit. Before the advent of mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles, bands faced the challenge of moving a brass quintet by up-armored high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) convoy. A HMMWV simply has no place to put a tuba in a road case. Now, with the advent of various iterations of MRAPs and up-armored light medium tactical vehicles, moving a band by convoy is less of a challenge.

### ***Instrument Maintenance***

Another challenge is maintaining musical instruments while deployed. Maintenance of musical instruments above the user level is nonexistent in theater unless the band has a noncommissioned officer trained to accomplish this task. Band personnel are prohibited

from performing instrument maintenance tasks for which they have not been adequately trained. An amateur effort to repair an instrument could result in permanent damage to its precision mechanisms.

Instrument repair is a master craft that takes years to learn. Training opportunities are available and range in intensity from a few days at a military repair facility to a year at only a few colleges in the country. Most civilian instrument repair technicians learn the old-fashioned way: through apprenticeship with a master craftsman.

Army leaders supporting bands must ensure that adequate facilities and resources are provided for the band to conduct a preventive maintenance program. This includes instrument repair kits authorized by the modification table of organization and equipment, a clean working environment, a deep sink for washing out brass instruments, plenty of maintenance supplies, and additional equipment and supplies as determined by the band commander.

Band leaders at all levels must ensure that proper care is taken and maintenance performed to prevent premature aging of instruments. Inevitably, many musical instruments are damaged beyond repair by excessive wear and tear in a performance environment for which professional musical instruments were never intended—the deployed theater. Band leaders must plan for instrument repair and replacement through the reset process. This process has been very challenging for Army bands since all musical instruments and musical support equipment are commercial off-the-shelf products.



**Members of the 34th Infantry Division Band perform as the "Red Bulls" rock band at Contingency Operating Base Adder on 14 June to celebrate the Army's 234th birthday. The Red Bulls are part of the 34th Infantry Division Band, Minnesota Army National Guard. (Photo by SGT Mark Miranda)**

## **Reset**

The Army Force Generation process, as the parent plan of reset, should be modified for Army bands because band instruments must be repaired or refurbished quickly after redeployment. Army band members must be without their musical instruments for the shortest time possible for several reasons.

The ability to practice is the most critical reason that band members must keep their equipment with them. Without continual practice, musicians quickly lose their highly perishable individual and collective musical skills. As with any physical requirement, the longer one does not exercise specific muscle groups or skills, the longer it will take to regain those skills. For Army band members, those skills are specifically established and delineated by regulation and assessed by band commanders. Once individual skills are regained to standard, collective training can begin.

Another critical reason that band members must have their equipment when they redeploy is that Army band mission requirements and demands for Army band participation do not decrease after redeployment. Actually, just the opposite is true. Following redeployment, Army bands are more in demand by their command and other organizations that they normally support.

For these two reasons, a redeployed Army band's musical instruments and support equipment must be repaired or replaced as quickly as possible. Bands with the foresight to identify musical instruments to replace before redeployment should do so while the unit is still deployed. This will ensure mission capability after their return.

## **Doctrine**

Doctrine on how Army bands should be employed is sometimes misinterpreted. Army band commanders are experts in all band matters, including employment of their bands. By Army doctrine, Army band operations is a human resources core competency that requires the G-1's attention. In both a garrison and a deployed environment, the G-1 or deployed C-1 of a command responsible for an Army band must take ownership of that band. Along with the band commander, the G/C-1 handles all band matters, including operations, under the guidance of the command chief of staff.

Army bands never should be deployed with a preconceived plan of missions for which they have not been trained. Army bands can contribute to the common defense of their home base, a convoy, or a remote forward operating base when and only when the tactical situation dictates. The unique individual and collective skills of band members should never be ignored, taken for granted, or wasted. Army bands bring to the area of operations a unique capability that no other unit possesses and that should be used to the fullest. Leaders should always be encouraged to take ownership of the command's band and to advocate supporting the band commander and band operations.

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