



The 1940s

At a glance

The population of Australia touches on eight million by the end of the decade. Australians enter the war against Nazi horror in Europe, and Japanese tyranny in the Asia Pacific, as they join forces with the allies for humanity. There is rationing of meat and clothing and soldiers can scarcely afford alcohol.

By 1942 Singapore falls and 15,000 Australians are taken prisoners of war. Australian World War II casualties: 180,864 wounded, 33,826 killed (8000 of those who died were prisoners of war).

Starting off the decade, Australia is deeply and culturally aligned with Britain, but things are about to change.

Mary Gilmore's rousing poem *No Foe Shall Gather Our Harvest*, published in *The Australian Women's Weekly* 29 June 1940, demonstrates the cultural alliance retained with Britain right from the first stanza. Here is an excerpt:

Sons of the mountains of Scotland,
Clansmen from correi and kyle,
Bred of the moors of England,
Children of Erin's green isle,
We stand four-square to the tempest,
Whatever the battering hail—
No foe shall gather our harvest,
Or sit on our stockyard rail.
...

— Mary Gilmore
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/51271905>

If you look at the \$10 note in your pocket, you will find a picture of Mary Gilmore there.

In 1942 Churchill makes it clear that, if necessary, he will take all measures to defend British soil and will not make troops available to help defend Australia against Japanese attack. Australia makes a counter-choice. At the end of 1941, Labour Prime Minister John Curtin's New Year message to the people is, 'Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom'.

America responds and Australia agrees to become the official base for US supreme command for the Pacific War. By 1943, there are 250,000 American troops in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, as well as in regional towns including Ballarat, preparing to fight.

In the aftermath of World War I Australians are not comfortable with the notion of conscription, so soldiers who join up are only required to defend Australian soil. However, Curtin realises that, to quash the Japanese efforts, Australian troops are required in the Pacific and South East Asia. It takes until 1943 for the Australian Government to agree to conscription for sending AIF (Australian Imperial Force) officers overseas.

With America's political support for Australia, and the presence of US Marines in Australia during the war, American culture is imported firmly into Australia. This cultural transplant affects music, fashion, lifestyle and aspirations for the rest of the century.



When farm workers enlist for the war effort, Australia loses many of its food producers. There is a much-needed solution to this problem in The Australian Women's Land Army, which forms in July 1942. Women earn new respect from men in rural communities where they take on the brunt of manual farming labour.

In 1940, The ABC employs their first woman broadcaster, Margaret Doyle, and in 1943 Edith Lyons and Dorothy Tagney are the first two women elected into Australian Parliament. The tide begins to turn for women's rights to work, to have a voice and to be heard.

Germany eventually surrenders in May 1945, followed by Japan in August, formally ending World War II in September 1945. Surviving soldiers return home and the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester make a visit to Australia as families across the nation reassemble their lives.

The 1946 Australian postwar immigration scheme creates another wave of multiculturalism for Australia, on a scale that has not been seen since the gold rush.

Media technology continues to transform people's lives every day and in 1945 the Australian National Film Board forms. In 1947 the ABC begins an independent radio news service.

The status of 'Australian Citizen' is created for the first time through *The Nationality and Citizenship Act* in 1948. In 1949 Robert Menzies leads the Liberal Party into power. The party remains in leadership for the next twenty-three years.



A bandsman in Manpower and the navy

It is hard to know what a musician might have experienced during the world wars of the last century. Luckily, their stories have been occasionally documented in personal letters like the ones that Alf Rowell wrote to his beloved (see pp. 24–25). Oral histories were taken, but they don't often focus on the role of the musician. Returned servicemen were encouraged to return to normal life. To move on. And sadly, many musicians died at war, their voices extinguished. So this is not a largely heard story.



1942, *He's Coming South* propaganda poster
WW II. Source: Australian War Memorial

It is a rare privilege then, to hear a contemporary account of the experiences of one such musician. And, if you played in the Ballarat Memorial Concert Band in the late 1990s or early 2000s, you may have even played alongside this charismatic gentleman.

Max Beeson was a teen in World War II and, to Max's disappointment, his mother refused to sign the papers that would enable him to join up when he was still under eighteen years of age.

'A lot of the young fellas used to think, "this is good, we're going to war"; it was a bit of a fun thing.' Max's wife, Angela, adds: 'When you're a teenager you don't realise'.

Max wanted to 'do his bit' for the country so, at the age of fourteen, he left Preston Tech where he had been enjoying playing in the brass ensemble, and started work for the government-operated 'Manpower'. This was before the government exerted control over the Australian national workforce in April 1942.



DISCOVER MORE

This short article, [Reserved occupations, Second World War](#) by the Australian War Memorial explains how Manpower operated.

They had the manpower, they controlled all the employment and they sent you where they wanted to, an ammunitions factory or whatever. Making uniforms, boots, making ammunition, arms, all sort of guns, artillery.

– Max Beeson



Max lived in Coburg, travelling by train to Newport each day to help prepare Caterpillar tractors, sent over from America by the thousand, to be readied to deliver up north for defence action.

After about six months of arduous commuting, Max was re-stationed to a timber yard in Brunswick, making wooden boxes to carry tinned food to send over to the troops. He remained in this employment until he joined the navy. 'We were pulling out nine-feet logs from mountain ash. If they fell on your foot you knew all about it!'

As soon as he came of age, he signed up for the navy. Having first learned the flute in 1937 and having played brass in the school ensemble in 1940 and 1941, Max was not immune to the magnetism of music.

I was eighteen, in the navy, doing training. I heard this band playing and I thought 'Christ, what's that? Where's the band?' And they said, 'That's the navy band'.

When I heard the band, that finished it.

– Max Beeson

In both world wars, military musicians had dual roles, usually as medical support. Navy musicians who trained and worked alongside Max were no exception. Max served in the navy as a musician from 1945 to 1953. Here are some stories from those years.

On the aircraft carrier we did first aid, that's where I first got interested in it. [Max went on to become a paramedic.] And fire fighting. That was our action station. But on the cruisers we were down what they call a *transmission station*, and that controls the big eight inch guns.

[We were on] HMAS Shropshire, the one that we went to Japan, where I saw all the after-effects of the atom bomb. I saw all of that. Normally we were musos, but that was our action station down the transmission station.

We played for all the ceremonies, ceremonial sunsets, officers' dinners, we played at one of the big posh pubs at Shanghai when Lizzie and Philip got married. All the bigwigs decided to put a dinner on in their honour, they couldn't get an orchestra and you'll never guess who drew the short straw! The band off the Aussie, us. We never got our tea til half past ten at night. When all the drunks went home. There was plenty left, I can tell you.

– Max Beeson

With a small audience including the author, Heather George and Karen George, and his wife Angela, Max entertained us with stories from the carrier ships:

A funny thing happened, I was on the aircraft carrier HMAS Sydney (<http://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-sydney-iii>), in the band, and when it came out from England there were six ex-royal marine bandsmen on it and, when it came out here, six Australians got drafted on to make the band a twelve, plus the bandmaster. These pommy blokes were real good players. And it was alright, we got on pretty well. And we went down to Hobart because the Navy used to go down there every January for the Regatta, so we were down there.



For church parade every Sunday morning on the flight deck, all instruments had to be cleaned and serviced on a Saturday afternoon. So in those days all the brass instruments were brass, they weren't silver and you only had to be there at sea for a week and they were green, because of the salt air. So that Saturday afternoon I spent two hours cleaning my 'Double B'. Anyhow, next morning we went down the band store to get our instruments. We had to go two decks up by ladders which brought us up to what we called the 'after lift well', where the planes were lifted from the hanger deck to the flight deck. The band falls in there and we're playing 'Hard to Vote' which is the regimental march of the Navy Band while the lift comes up. On this morning, we're standing there, the bloke pulls the lever, lift comes up, ding ding ding, we're playing dum da da dum da da, got up the top, he pulled it [the lever] too far, and we went down again!

Heather: Now you see us, now you don't!

Max: That was a balls up!

This pommy bloke he played eupho and cello. In those days, if you played brass you had to play a string at certain times – cello is nearly the same music as the eupho. This is in 1950. So I clean me bass, next morning we went down the church parade as I said, went to get the bass out of the case ... it's not there! We're down three decks, couldn't find it. So I went up to the bandmaster (he was a mongrel) and I said to him, 'Sir someone's pinched my bass'. To which came a gruff reply, 'What do you mean someone's pinched your bass?' I said, 'It's not in the case'. He says 'There's an Eb bass down there somewhere'. I said, 'I think there is, I'll go and have a look'. So anyhow I found it because there's only one bass player and I opened the case and the damn thing was green, coz no one used it, you see. Couldn't get the valves moving, this was a quarter to eight and we're supposed to muster at ten to eight. So anyhow, I said to one of the other players, 'Have you got any valve oil?' And he said 'Yeah', so I got the valve working and tore up to the flight deck, no after lift or fall in, and do you know what the bandmaster said to me? He said, 'Didn't you clean it?' That's what the sort of mongrel he was.

Anyhow, to cut the long story short, we couldn't find the bass. So I think it was on the Monday morning there's a big search about the ship for the bass. Lofty who was one of the poms, eupho and cello player, he confessed ... he threw it over the side!

The story is, he come back as full as a boot from the pub, went down the band store, got the string bass out of the case, and he couldn't get it up through the band hole because in the Navy at 21:00 hours all hatches are shut in case there's a collision in the night. And so he couldn't get it up through the manhole so what does he do? He goes back and gets the 'Double B', went through the manhole and kept going. The instrument went down through sixty feet of water!



HMAS Sydney prepares to raise from the lift well to the flight deck and make ready a Sea Fury for launch while Anzac takes up rescue destroyer station astern.

Source: Royal Australian Navy



So on the Thursday they got Navy divers down to bring it up, in the mud. They brought it up and I said to one of the divers, 'Me mouthpiece is missing' and he said, 'What's that mate?'. So I showed him what one was and he said 'I'll go down and have a look for you'. So he went back down and he couldn't find it. Anyhow, when you do something wrong it's 'off caps'. So we had to front up to the commander over this business. Blah blah blah, blah blah blah blah, the commander said to him. Lofty replied, 'I couldn't get the string bass up so I put the Double B over'. He said 'What for?' He said, 'I wanted to teach it to swim!'

That was the first I've ever seen a Master at Arms laugh. In the old days they used to have the whip and use it.

– Max Beeson

In 1946, Max went offshore in Hiroshima just after the war.

I saw what was left of Japan. The atom bomb. Me and me mate were walking down the street, and a bloke was walking the other way towards us like this [limping with body slanted and distorted]. And I said to my friend, Norm, 'What do you think is wrong with this poor old sod?'. Anyhow, when we got up close to him we were able to see that his right arm was fused to his body, his ear was gone, no eye. He was only one. Others were limping, and others were getting round on sticks, some were all disfigured. When the bomb went off I think it was 300 degrees, the centre of it was, and from there it fanned out [showing with his hands the way the burn from the bomb spread].

It was timed to go off 130 feet above the ground and that's exactly what happened. And Nagasaki was the same, we went there later, that was the same. Tokyo wasn't far behind it.

The Japanese used to give cheek to the yanks a bit, but the Aussies? No way, no way. They were frightened of us, because the word got around what happened.

I went with my friend Norm down to the market [Japan 1946] to meet some Japanese girls we'd become friendly with and they could speak fluent English. We used to take soap and talc powder over because you couldn't get any of that. Especially the chicks because they'd like a nice smoke, the smell of it. We used to give it to them. We could have got a lot of Yen for it, but we gave it to them.

And I said to the eldest one, 'How come you speak English so well?' She says, 'Oh, we were taught English because we knew the Japanese Army was going to overrun Australia'. They were taught that. They had money printed and all.

– Max Beeson



It is true that the Japanese military had printed a number of invasion money currencies to be used as a stable currency in the takeover of countries in the Pacific. It is also true that in 1942 the Japanese military decided it was too risky to undertake an Australian invasion. The same year, the Australian government intercepted and decoded intelligence to this effect but decided to withhold the information from the Australian public until the middle of the following year, 1943, in order to save face after making it central to their war propaganda claim – and perhaps also to retain a very powerful fear motivator.



1940s, Japanese invasion currency: a one shilling note. Source: Australian War Memorial



DISCOVER MORE

Read Peter Stanley's 2010 ABC news article, [What 'Battle for Australia'?](#) exploring the issues of whether Japan intended to invade Australia.



The band in the 1940s



1941, Annual meeting program cover. Source: BMCB Archive

McGregor Bollard took over from Jack Allan and carried on for a couple of years until he left the town. Lew (Lewellyn) Thomas carried on as bandmaster until the mid-40s.

We know a bit about Lew thanks to his grandson, bandsman David Morris. Lew was one of four boys and three girls from a musical family, with their father being one of the first registered music teachers in Victoria (before Victoria was registered as a state) as well as a choral conductor. From all accounts David Morris found that the Thomas brothers were 'stellar musos'.

One of Lew's brothers, Hal (the eldest of the boys), wrote a piece while living in Ballarat for the war effort called *I'll fill his vacant place* – a piece for piano and voice. According to the family history, Hal didn't have to work for a few years because of the proceeds of this song.

David Morris has a photo of Lew and his brothers playing in the Lyric Theatre Orchestra in 1911. He explained that *not just any bandsman* would have been eligible to have played in the orchestra because there were ladies in attendance. Apparently these three 'passed muster' and were deemed to have been of good enough character to include.



View the score
I'll fill his vacant place by Hal Thomas on Trove.



Bandsmen of the era were drawn largely from the working class and were considered to be 'rough round the edges' by the society's upper echelons.

Lew played tenor horn and was a contemporary of the famous horn player, conductor and teacher Percy Code. When Code returned from playing in America he is said to have invited Lew to play in his Melbourne orchestra. Who knows where this would have taken Lew, as Code went on to conduct the Australian Broadcasting Company's orchestra for many years? But Lew declined the offer to leave Ballarat because he and his wife were expecting a child.

So why didn't Lew go to war? Lew was a Welsh Nationalist who never went to war because of his beliefs, but instead worked as a bootmaker in his Eyre Street shop, playing in the band for recreation and community service. This choice afforded the Soldiers' Band a much-needed fill-in bandmaster during the lean war years.



1945, Soldiers' Band with Lew Thomas, Bandmaster. Source: BMCB Archive

Rasmussen returns

Battalion Bandmaster Bert Rasmussen was reappointed after his return from active service overseas.

His association with the Ballarat Memorial Soldiers' Band was long standing and he had already led the band for a time in the 1920s until he was forced to take work in a theatre orchestra for financial reasons.



1948 saw the resumption of South Street Contests and contesting in general. We were again successful in winning the 'B' Grade Selection Contest. The Band was upgraded to 'A' Grade in 1949 and competed at the Australian Championship at Launceston Tas. Gaining second place to Collingwood who were conducted by the famous 'Massa' Johnston.

– Bill Wilkinson



c.1949, Soldiers' Band, South Street Quickstep competitions. Source: Fred Fargher Archive



Bill Fargher with his son Fred on the Launceston trip. Source: Fred Fargher Archive

Long-time bandsman Bill Fargher's son Fred Fargher remembers staying at the YMCA in Launceston for the Australian Championship, sharing it with Maryborough Brass Band: 'It was just this huge open area with all these army bunks all around.'

I remember the trip over and I particularly remember Bert Rasmussen. It was very, very rough [the ocean]. It was Easter period, my Dad was sick, everybody was ill. And I didn't get seasick and I remember them all being so grey and horrible. It was an overnight trip on the old Taroona. We left at four o'clock in the afternoon from Melbourne and went through the heads at about six.

I can still remember the impact of the swell all of a sudden hitting the ship. And I remember arriving and all the band members were saying 'Oh God never again'. Bert Rasmussen, Bill Wilkinson and somebody else all booked aircraft flights back. They were determined not to have to do that again!

But Fred travelled back by ship, and the return journey was 'as calm as a mill pond'.

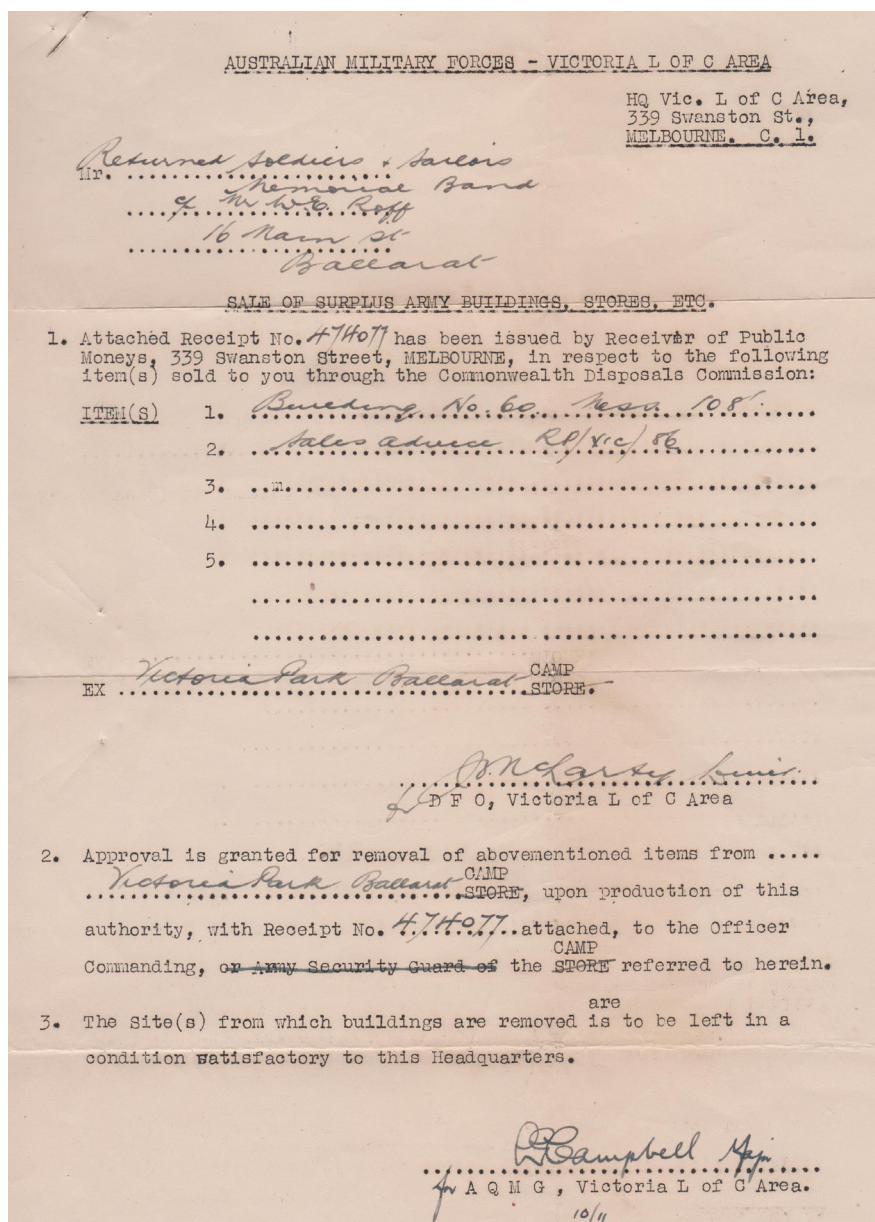
New premises for the band

Bill Roff became president of the band around 1943. According to Bill Wilkinson's history, Bill was, 'responsible for the purchase of the site for the bandroom, and the erection of the present building'. This happened in the years following World War II because it was an ex-army hut that, according to President George Horwood in his annual report of April 1981, was bought on 9 November 1945 from the Commonwealth of Australia for £192 and relocated from Victoria Park.

In the minutes it is recorded:

Moved into Band Room August 11th 1946.

Last Parade at 107 Camp Street, May 26th 1946.



1945, Document showing sale of surplus army building from Victoria Park. Source: BMMCB Archive



Jimmy Allen, life member and player for forty-five years with the Soldiers', played with the band in the 40s as a young lad. Jimmy Allen reminisces with Jim Dennis on the most important banding performances in his life and the move to the new premises in Eastwood Street:

Jimmy Allen: The most important one we done when the war was on; we were too young to go in the army but we used to do church parades up in the army camp up in Victoria Park. We used to play the music and they used to march down to the church. Every Sunday. I got a certificate at home from the governor actually for what we used to do up there in the convalescent camp ... I would say I was going up there for about four and a half to five years and they used to pick us up in army trucks and take us up. That was for the returned soldiers who were injured. So it started a couple of years after the war started.

We used to look forward to it too because in those days the rations were on and when we were doing those church parades, we were allowed to go into the canteen at Victoria Park and we used to buy cigarettes for our father. That was the Soldiers' Memorial Band and then they altered it because there were no 'Airmen' in the name.

We used to have not a bad little band then ... pretty good. The bandsmen in those days used to be pretty keen kids didn't they, Jim?

Jim Dennis: Oh yes, it was a great form of entertainment. There was no TV. Families were pretty much providing their own entertainment and listening to the radio, listening to bands play on the radio. They'd go up to the Lake [Wendouree] and to the Gardens [Ballarat Botanical] where all bands, not only the Soldiers' Band but the Ballarat City Band, would go up there and would do concerts on a regular basis. They'd even go on the steam boat, the paddle boat.

Jimmy A: Every Sunday, every second Sunday, we'd go on the boat.

Jim D: Yeah, do performances up there so it was a great family thing. So, you'd get concerts and you'd get these kids coming through. 'Hey Dad, I want to play the trumpet!', 'Oh Dad, I want to play trombone!' So you'd have this feeding all the time, it was an essential part of life, a central part of entertainment. Music.

Jimmy A: We got donations from here, there and everywhere. We put hours and hours and hours into banding. We used to play regularly every second Sunday at the Gardens and vice versa with the City Band. The alternate Sunday we would play in one of the Sturt Street Rotundas, either the Titanic or Alexandra. When the Yanks were here right opposite the Alexandra Rotunda they used to run the M.P.O. (Military Police Office), where the photographer is now, and we had music that used to turn them on and they'd be snapping their fingers and jumping around. And we'd get donations and the donations were good. The Yanks had plenty of money.

Before then, we were at the Drill Hall [currently Dan Murphy's]. Alf Rowell rehearsed with the City Band there and we rehearsed with Rasmussen in the Drill Hall.

Young players for the band

The best way to keep a steady stream of junior players joining the band, was to seek them out and train them up.

There were many mentors for up-and-coming players who gave generously of their time to continue the brass band tradition in Ballarat. Young lads like Jimmy Allen learned to play in Bandmaster Alf Rowell's Brass Band at Pleasant Street Primary School and committed bandsmen such as Bill Fargher tutored young students in their homes, voluntarily, on behalf



of the band. All to get the next generation up to scratch to join them in their love of brass banding.

Bill Fargher taught Norm Newey, who played in the band around 1950–1970 and who contributed so much to music in Ballarat through performing and teaching brass. Bill also taught his own son Fred Fargher (as well as their young neighbour) until Fred's love of dance captivated the young boy's every waking moment, ignited by Wavie Williams Pantomime Company. At this time young Fred did not know that he was soon to give up the cornet to dedicate his energies to dance and theatre, to become an influential choreographer in BLOC and LYRIC theatre companies, and eventually to host his own tonight show on BTV6.

Wavie Williams Pantomime Company

Wavie Williams Pantomime Company was set up to raise money during WW II and provided a welcome community counterpoint to the grim realities of war. Wavie's company became immensely popular for its annual large scale performances, drawing enormous crowds to Her Majesty's Theatre throughout the 40s and 50s.

In this photo we see a group of young dancers including Ballarat vintage collector, Leah Willian's Aunt Jean (labelled 'me' in the photo). Leah interviewed her elderly aunt to find out more about her experiences with the company during the war. Jean remembers shows such as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Cinderella. She loved 'being involved, loved the dress ups, the dancing, the costumes'. Jean remembers Wavie to be 'good and kind and very nice' leading the popular shows for which 'Her Majesty's was always sold out'.

Jean also remembers that they used to raise money for the costumes by having a Rabbit Drive. Wavie would hire a bus and they would all drive into the country and run around and chase rabbits to sell.



1946, Wavie Williams Pantomime Company troupe. Source: Leah Willian, great niece of early Soldiers' Band drum major Alexander Willian



Norm went on to play in private bands with Bill Fargher and gained enormously from his musical mentorship.

Fred shares his memories of his father's musical work ethic and being in the junior band with Rasmussen:

I can remember Mr Rasmussen saying, 'How come you know those notes?' ... 'My dad taught me'. My dad was a stickler for me knowing the theory of music, how to read music and knowing the staves. There weren't many people in that original intake when they had the idea to start the junior band. I remember there would have only been eight or ten of us sitting around that blackboard with Bert Rasmussen.

Allan Reid who worked for Burt Wilson, the electrician, he was a really good cornet player and he was learning before he came into the junior band. I remember because I was really impressed the first time he sat alongside me, it was his first band practice and he could play ... he was really good.

They were playing Wednesday and Sunday morning. It was my only way of getting out of church! When I gave it away, my mother insisted I had to go to church [again]!

Sgt HL Rasmussen: battalion musician, field ambulance and bandmaster



28 June 1940, Sgt HL Rasmussen, Leader 2/8th Australian Infantry Battalion Band, Middle East, British Mandate of Palestine. Palestine Kilo 89. Source: Australian War Memorial Accession Number 002227

Junior band members from the 40s and 50s remember their time with Bert Rasmussen. Fred Fargher recalls:

He would fire up, lose his temper easily, but he probably had reason to. I don't know that band members from the day did a lot of home rehearsal. It was very much at the bandroom; you sort of tried to get it right and then a lot of them wouldn't have touched the pieces. I remember the year, the test piece, I think it was the Frank Wright year, I'm not sure, the test piece was a version of Tchaikovsky's fifth symphony and I can remember that year the band was playing really well and they were determined to be top of the 'B' Grade, and I think they were and I think they won it.

Dad rehearsed and rehearsed with the trumpet line in our living room ... I knew Tchaikovsky's fifth symphony backwards by the time they went up with it. Dad took it seriously. I was made to take it seriously, but I'm not sure, when I think back that a lot of the players [did] ... I can't remember



who the drum player was that left the band, but he was simply the bass drum player and they had a lot of trouble replacing him ... and I remember who they got for a short period of time and he was hopeless. He had no sense of rhythm and I remember Bert Rasmussen with him, trying to control his temper because the bloke just couldn't keep in time!

Norm Newey also remembers an intriguing story about Bandmaster Rasmussen:

Under Rasmussen at the old Alfred Hall, it must have been the very early 50s and Rasmussen was a very tense bandmaster and there was something going on in the euphonium section in the middle of one section. He picked up the stand and he slammed it down in front of the second euphonium player as if to say, 'You play it!'. This was in the middle of the performance, being judged and everything. He was savage and he was so tense, I can remember that.

I didn't realise it at the time, but these guys had just come out of the second world war.

– Norm Newey

For these young lads, it would have been very hard to understand what these ex-servicemen had experienced.

It is hard for us to imagine now.

Thanks to Neil Leckie's research at the Ballarat Ranger Military Museum, a letter written by Rasmussen to his daughter, and an account given just before his death when he was eighty-nine, we have an insight into Rasmussen's wartime experiences. We also gain an understanding of his life just before he came back to lead the Soldiers' Band, through the postwar 40s and into the 50s.

I hope you are sitting down ...

Herbert Ludwig Rasmussen, born in 1895, hailing from the District of Ballarat, served in both wars as battalion musician, field ambulance and bandmaster. He joined the 1/8 Battalion in World War I and 2/8 Battalion in World War II. According to the 2/8 Battalion history, Bert and his son Les were the only father and son combination in the battalion.



1940, the original members of the 2/8th Battalion Band, Palestine. Source: *The Second Eighth, A History of the 2/8th Australian Infantry Battalion*, published by the 2/8th Battalion Association, Melbourne 1984. Provided by Neil Leckie, Museum Manager, Ballarat Ranger Military Museum

The original members of the Battalion band, Palestine 1940. Back Row: T. Schaffert (POW Crete), R. Ferrier, R. Rowe, L. Bulled (POW Crete), J. Greer (died while POW Crete). Second row: A. McCormick, L. Rasmussen, T. Davey, G. Farmer, J. Perry, J. Hallett, D. Kent. Third row: B. McMahon (POW Crete), G. Blowers (missing, Crete), J. Lynch (POW Crete), H. Rasmussen (POW Crete), J. Langshaw, J. Towers, D. McGregor (POW Crete), N. Scott (POW Crete). Front: E. Tinker, C. Kemp, J. Morton, L. Randall.



The 2/8th Battalion, as part of the 6 Division, undertook training in Egypt and Palestine from 1940 in preparation for their first battle against the Italian forces in Libya. To develop their fitness they swam in the Mediterranean. To develop their *esprit de corps*, they played competitive cricket, hockey and held inter-unit regimental band contests.

In the *History of the Battalion* (p. 13), the results of one of these band competitions is recorded: 'The Battalion band, which comprised many excellent musicians, and was under the leadership of Sgt Bert Rasmussen who had been the bandmaster in the first 8th Battalion, won the competition.'

After the Libyan campaign, the battalion's service continued; by now they had been absorbed into the 19th Brigade due to a restructure in the AIF, following a British military model. Rasmussen's experience, when compared with civilian banding experience, was nothing short of extraordinary. (We will read in his own words what happened to him, in a moment.)

It [2/8th Battalion] played only a small role at Bardia (3-5 January 1941) but suffered the heaviest casualties of any Australian unit during the battle for Tobruk (21-22 January 1941), after having to attack a strong point constructed around a line of dug-in tanks. The 19th Brigade led the divisional advance onwards to Benghazi, which was reached on 6 February; the Italian forces surrendered the next day. In early April 1941 the 2/8th deployed to Greece. It fought a fierce battle with German troops at Vevi in the country's north on 11 and 12 April but, overstretched and assailed by a vastly superior force, was forced to withdraw. The battalion became disorganised, lost a great deal of its weapons and equipment, and many of its troops were separated.'

– Neil Leckie, *Country Victoria's Own: 150 Year History of 8th/7th Battalion Royal Victoria 1858–2008*.

On the night of 26 April, the men were evacuated from Kalamata. They departed in two ships: 199 men were taken straight back to Egypt, while another 394 made an unplanned, circuitous and very unfortunate landing on Crete. Sgt Rasmussen was among those who made a Crete landing.

This astounding story of Bert Rasmussen's POW capture by the Germans gives us an insight into the sorts of duties that musicians performed as part of the battalion, the high value placed on musical instruments during the war and the dangers that musicians faced.

Bert Rasmussen was 89 years of age on April 1, 1984. He gives a brief account of his capture:

I will give a brief account of a certain event in Greece. No credit to certain members of the Battalion. You know the mix up when the Battalion reached the wrong place in Greece.

Then we had to move to Florina, the Battalion was digging-in in the hills, and the CO the next morning sent me back with two trucks loaded with the Battalion stores and four men. We landed back about 30 miles or more in a valley, they unloaded the stores, two boxes of band instruments amongst them. I was ordered not to move more than thirty yards and wait for orders.

About the third night or so I thought I could hear troops moving back up on the road which was a few hundred yards away. I went up the road and a New Zealand captain (Tanks) asked who I was etc. And I explained that I was in charge of the 2/8 Battalion stores. 'That's strange, your Battalion went through here two days ago. You will have to burn all your stores.' 'But,' I said, 'I can't as there are two boxes of band instruments there.' He said he was in charge of the light aid to help stragglers.



I got back to camp and my men were pulling a case of Australian beer out of Brigade Headquarters' burning dump. I got as many bottles as I could and took them up to the road to the New Zealanders. On the way back the New Zealand officer sent a man after me to say he could give me a couple of trucks.

It started to drizzle rain; we loaded the instruments and some tents and travelled a couple of days before we met the 2/8 Battalion.

The Adjutant 'Ranji' said, 'Did you save the instruments?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'A bloody good job!'

They kept the instruments until we reached the coast a few days later and the bandsmen took them aboard the Costa Rica, some of the bandsmen were on another ship. When the Costa Rica was sinking we were lucky to get off with our lives. We were told to leave everything and get off, there was no hope of saving the instruments. I just threw off my boots and jumped into the sea; a motor boat from the destroyers picked us up.

On Crete Major Key sent me down to the wharf with about twelve men to go on a hospital ship; he gave me some secret papers before to hand to 'Ranji' but the German paratroopers came. I burnt the papers before being taken prisoner.

I met one of the New Zealand drivers while prisoner and when he saw me he said: 'The bloody Aussie who got the beer from nowhere!'

– *The Second Eighth: A History of the 2/8th Australian Infantry Battalion*, 2/8th Battalion Association, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 359–360. Provided by Neil Leckie, Museum Manager, Ballarat Ranger Military Museum.

Later in the same history we hear an account from a fellow Crete POW about their experience in the POW camp.

Bob Slocombe was Pioneer Platoon Sergeant from the 2/8 who ended up in Hohenfels as a POW in the same hut as his fellow battalion serviceman Rasmussen. They were the only two from the 2/8 cohabiting with others in their 6-by-2-tier bunkered small hut from 1942 to 1945.

Bob describes sauerkraut that tasted horrible, poor nutritional intake and severe rations which left some with bleeding gums and loose teeth. By 1944 he weighed 8 stones 2 pounds. For a young man half-an-inch shy of 6 foot, who usually had a fit weight of 13 stones, he had lost a lot.

During the day to pass the time, they participated in education classes, concerts, plays and Gilbert and Sullivan musicals. By night they played cards. And when they were well enough, they played Aussie Rules football.

When fuel rations ran low the men burned materials from the hut itself to keep themselves warm. They then stole materials from the camp at night to repair their huts. At one point the German soldiers were tired of this and opened fire on the men with their machine guns. Bob recalls that some of the men from their hut made a narrow escape with their lives.

On 6 January 1945, *The Australian Women's Weekly* published the following letter from Rasmussen to his daughter Mrs NB Miller in Nhill:

How happy I am to get your letters. Mail day and Red Cross parcel day are the big events in our life. Knowing we are not forgotten has helped us through many a dark day.



Twice a week we go for a three mile walk into the country. We have a guard with us, but it is great just to be out of the barbed wire if only for a short while.

– ‘War prisoners’ many interests’, *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, 8 January 1945. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/47117707>?

Finally, late in March 1945, the camp was disbanded leaving those too ill to travel to be picked up by the Americans, and those who were well enough travelled with the German guards in what is described as ‘a somewhat aimless journey in the chaos of dismantling a war’. But they were weak and susceptible to dysentery. On their way they encountered concentration camp survivors: ‘We thought we were skinny but were heavy weights compared to them. Their eyes and skulls looked so large in comparison with the rest of their bodies.’ (*The Second Eighth: A History of the 2/8th Australian Infantry Battalion*, p. 318)

We are fortunate to be able to hear firsthand accounts of what it was like to play under the baton of Rasmussen in the Soldiers’ Band in the 40s and 50s. Cornet player, Kevin Howell, was one such 50s member, a teenager at the time. Kevin remembers: ‘Bert was a grand old man and he was champion euphonium player of Australia at one stage in the early days so it was exciting to be around those people’.



26 May 1946, Memorial Band's final parade, completing four years' voluntary service. Source: BMCB Archive



Snapshot of postwar Ballarat

Lindsay George was another member of the band who played through these years. Lindsay's memory of playing with the band on 13 March 1947 speaks to the physical nature of war recovery and the role the band could play.

The Ballarat Soldiers, Sailors and Airman's Memorial Band played at the official 'Turning of the First Sod' at the site of what is now the White Swan Reservoir Retaining Wall – a holding dam for the Ballarat catchment area.

The Band set up to play on a cleared and prepared hill, which was one of the two that formed the ends of the retaining wall (the first clay cored, earth and rock fill at the time).

The project was used to create work for demobilised Servicemen returning from active war service. To supply fill for the wall, mullock heaps from discarded mines, in and around Ballarat were transported by truck to the dam wall. It took five minutes for a truck to pull into position and to be loaded with five buckets of mullock from a powered shovel and then to move off leaving a spot for the next truck. So on both sides of the road between the wall and the loader shovel, the trucks were at regular five minute intervals. This continued until the dam wall was completed.

I well remember waking up one morning to the noise of a huge loader shovel being placed into position opposite our house in Albert Street. I remember that the removal of the heap started around October, as this was the Bands contest time and that it snowed, blanketing the huge heap, which was about three hi-tension electric poles high. Slowly but surely the waste or mullock from the deepest gold mine in Victoria was carted away. The Sebastopol Kindergarten now stands on the site, beside the hall, which served as the pay office for South Star Mining Company.

And so the Band played on.

– Lindsay George, AGM program, 2001.

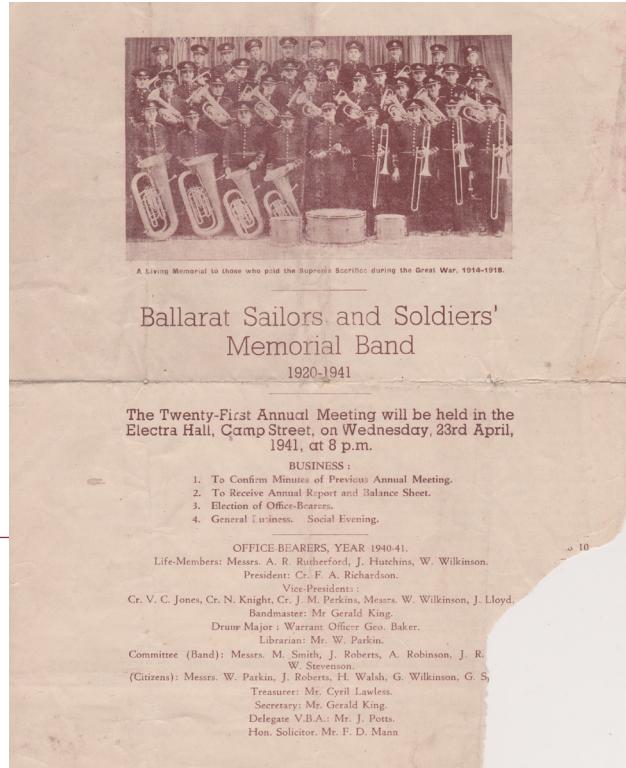
In a decade characterised by war, once again, a band for returned servicemen played its part in consolidation and reparation of a community reeling from the effects of trauma and loss.

Note the motto under this 1941 program's photo: A Living Memorial to those who paid the Supreme Sacrifice during the Great War, 1914–1918.



Leaf through the 1941 program from the annual meeting held at Electra Hall, Camp Street.

Source: BMCB Archive





Introducing Percy Code

Percy Code played as a soloist with world-famous English Brass Band, Besses 'o th' Barn, after his 1910 win at South Street. He returned to Australia and settled in Ballarat for a time where he was choir and band conductor and taught and influenced a generation of Ballarat and District brass players including Frank Wright.

Percy Code was a big name in Ballarat and people used to go to Percy Code's place for lessons, near St Peter's church, a few doors up from there. You'd knock on the door and he'd probably be taking someone, and you'd go in, it was like going to the doctor, you'd sit in the waiting room, and your turn came to go in with Percy.

– Bob Pattie, Ballarat City Band

He performed in America with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and went on to become principal conductor of ABC radio's orchestra, broadcasting nationally for decades from the 20s to the 40s.



Mr. PERCY CODE, Winner Champion Solo, 1911
PATERNS BOOSEY INSTRUMENTS

1911 postcard, Percy Code, winner Champion Solo. Source: Bob Pattie Archive, kindly donated to BMCB



Bathurst, massed bands, Percy Code conducting, postcard.
Source: Bob Pattie Archive kindly donated to BMCB



Percy Code (left) and Wilkinson (not Bill). Source: Bob Pattie Archive donated to BMCB



DISCOVER MORE

Read the history of the 8/7th Battalion.

Did you know that World War II made an irreversible difference to women's status and opportunities in the workforce? The Australian Women's Land Army was a game changer. Learn about how an outwardly male-dominated World War II helped women gain purchase in the war against inequality in Women in wartime.



Hear recordings of HL Rasmussen leading the 8/7 Infantry Battalion Band playing *Night in June* and their own Battalion March *I'm 95* recorded in 1959 on the SongWays Ranger Barracks page.

Plus, learn more about the extraordinary Drill Hall building where the Soldiers' Band rehearsed before moving to the ex-army hut on the Eastwood Street site in 1946.



APPLY AT YOUR NEAREST NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICE

1943, 'Join us in a victory' job poster, Maurice Bramley colour photolithograph on paper. ARTV00332, Source: AWM Collection



Marching



Soldiers' Memorial Band looking relaxed mid-century as they change tunes as they pass the Titanic Bandstand (opposite cnr of Sturt and Camp St, Ballarat). Source: BMCB Archive

Brass band marching in 20th Century Australian life has two main elements: the quickstep and street marches.

What is the quickstep?

The quickstep is a type of brass band marching competition. It was held in various locations across Australia and New Zealand. In Ballarat it was held between the years 1900 and 1978 at South Street (with several periods of no competitions due to war and lack of entrants).

Marching competitions (but not the quickstep) reappeared in different formats in South Street after 1986; interestingly, the same year in which no brass band section entered.

- 1987 – Street March competitions, aggregates 'A' to 'D' grade
- 1988 – Festival Day Street March, no aggregate grades
- 1989 – Street March

Again in 1990 we see no brass band sections in the competition and, from 1990, there are no marching competitions held at South Street, to the time of writing.



Manoeuvres on the march

By contrast with Britain, the emphasis in both Australia and New Zealand was on visual spectacle as well as efficient playing, and quick-step march competitions, with the bands executing elaborate manoeuvres while playing on the march, became a major feature of most contests. The rules for marching contests eventually achieved a terrifying complexity, with the marks being awarded more for smart appearance and successful drilling than for musicianship.

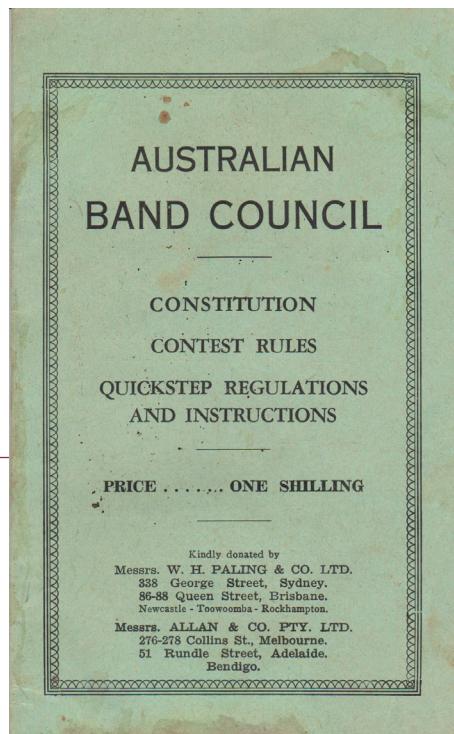
– Duncan Blythell, 'The Brass Band in the Antipodes' in Trevor Herbert, *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Social History*, p. 236.

It is small wonder that Harry Mortimer, who adjudicated at the New Zealand national contest 1953, was led to remark: 'I hate to think what some of my best bands would sound like if they had to play on the march as your men have done. I've never seen anything like it.' (For this quote, Duncan referenced Newcomb's, *Music of the People: The Story of the Band Movement in New Zealand 1845–1963*, pp. 92–94.)



Leaf through the 1934 Australian Band Council booklet Quickstep Regulations and Instructions.

Source: BMCB Archive



Attention to detail – so as not to chance losing a single point – was not just given by the bandsmen:

But the greatest contribution was made by the small army of womenfolk who accompanied the Band at competitions.

Points could be lost for dirty shoes, missing buttons, untidy hair, etc. With that in mind, once the players had assembled on parade, these good ladies would swarm over them, armed with clothes brushes, spit-and-polish, and all accoutrements required to remove a minuscule of fluff that could tarnish the image of their charges. All of this of course was a labour of love.

– Maureen French, *Following the Bands*, 2013, p. 64.



But is the quickstep competition a nineteenth century UK innovation? Gavin Holman, project manager of the worldwide band history resource www.ibew.co.uk, explains the history of the quickstep in England:

The quickstep contests were, and are, much simpler here. No fancy drill or manoeuvering. Just march from A to B as smartly as possible (both in deportment and musical terms), followed by the static “contest level” march piece performance, where appropriate. Where both elements were in play, the road march was usually less technical than the static march.

Quickstep contests were either an adjunct to a main test piece contest – usually one of the smaller “local” events, or a contest in its own right. The major competitions (National, Regional, Open etc.) never had a march component. Popular contest formats included:

- a) set or own-choice test piece,
- b) entertainment (usually 20 minute set)
- c) March + Hymn + test piece (where the march was played static on stage).

Other variants, of course, exist(ed).

Drill-based show bands did make an appearance here in the middle of the 20th century, and some still exist, but they never really took on (unlike the USA).

– Gavin Holman

Quickstep is a big deal

In around 1912, '13, '14, they used to have a public holiday so the people could attend the bands marching on the Ballarat City Oval.

– Bob Pattie

But support was still very strong in the 40s, 50s and 60s:

There was a lot more interest in brass bands, per se, at the time [40s]. The South Street band competition was big deal. We used to go up to the City Oval for the quickstep competition and LOVE it. It was grand. And there were a lot of bands involved because there was A, B, C and D grade.

– Fred Fargher

Fred attended band comps with his family to see his father, Bill Fargher, play with the Soldiers' Band even before he was old enough to join the junior band. Noel Mitaxa has similar strong memories of seeing his father Steph Mitaxa, stalwart member of the Soldiers' Band, performing at South Street from the 1930s to the 1970s.

The masses of crowds at the City Oval. The quickstep along the fireman's track ... It was overwhelming.

– Noel Mitaxa

Noel remembers fondly many occasions of running up and down the huge staircase when he was a small child – the grandstand at the Ballarat City Oval. He hadn't been there in over half a century, yet still clearly remembers the banisters and the staircase.



It was quite safe because kids could run around and you could go back to mum and dad.

– Noel Mitaxa

As you may gather, the quickstep was taken very seriously in the world-renowned South Street competitions and for most of the life of the competitions, the quickstep points were included in the points for the aggregate.

It was a big deal. And if the band entered in the competition and they won the music playing and everything, they wouldn't win the championship because they'd have to win the quickstep as well.

– Jimmy Allen

Paces could make the difference between winning or losing the competition. It was a very specific, technical part of the competition that could be judged objectively. Every band had the same music in the quickstep competition, the same set of notes to play, but how they handled their paces could either set them in the lead or leave them disqualified.



1959, Soldiers' Band South Street, Quickstep competition. Source: BMCB Archive

Two people, pictured in South Street quickstep competition photos, are not in the band: one is the adjudicator of the music, the other is counting the steps.



Bands used to write to the council to ask permission to use the City Oval for quickstep practice in the lead up to South Street comps.

We had to march one 120 [paces], exactly 30 inches [per pace] in 60 seconds and you had to start with your heel on a line and you had to finish with your heel on the line and it was exact. And that's what you were judged for the 'straight'. And that's why you had a pacer and you had a timer and then you did one of about three set diagrams of left turns, right turns, counter marches, side to side, rear to rear and you were judged on everything all the time.

You had the adjudicator standing there looking at you and as soon as you stopped playing and you come to the final halt was when the adjudicator had to stop taking points off. And we had a drum major that was pretty switched on and the band members, some of the senior band members were switched on and they chose a piece of music and they had it down, absolutely so pat that at the end of the march when we come to heard the whistle for three paces to halt, we halted exactly at the end of the music and the adjudicator had to stop but he couldn't look down the lines, he couldn't take points off.

Normally you come to a halt and you have to play to the end of the music and it could be another ten seconds or so. And we halted and stopped at the same time and the adjudicator was most annoyed. 'Get your band off!' All legal and above board. It usually didn't happen like that. It was very precise.

– Jim Dennis, Ballarat City Band

Discipline and precision

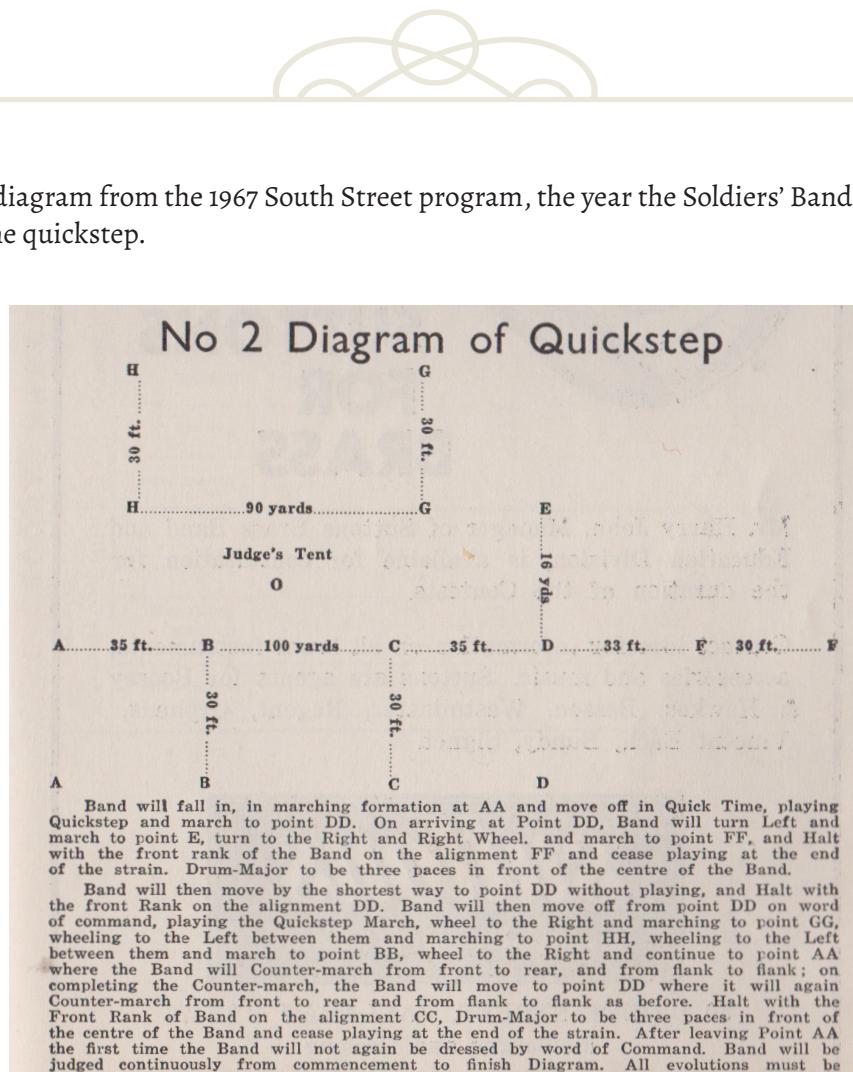
It was highly disciplined. The uniforms were military style with stripes down the side. The livery was very precise. You had to be judged, you would line up in formation and a separate adjudicator what come by and look at you and he'd march up and down the line and you'd have to have an inspection. The drum major could declare anything that was wrong and if somebody's button had come off at the last minute, they could declare it. Your hair couldn't come over the collar. We used to have a fellow come round and he'd brush your collars and your shoes had to be black and shiny, absolutely clean you had to be at attention with your heels together and your feet had to be 15 degrees, not 16 or 20 or 10. 15 degrees. We had a fellow [City Bandsman], he was an English fellow, he normally used to stand up like that [not within the regulations] and we had to declare it every time and the drum major would say,

I have two things to declare sir, one of them is we have a gentleman there, he naturally stands like that, he's not able to put his feet at 15 degrees, he's like that and he can't do it.

You'd declare it and you wouldn't get points taken off.

The instruments had to be clean, absolutely clean and precise. The adjudicator or inspector would come along and if he took your instrument then you'd look him straight in the eye, he would take your instrument and you wouldn't take your eyes off his eyes. You wouldn't offer it to him. He would take it out of your hands, say you had a cornet, he'd take it out of your hand, your hand stayed where it was he would look at the instrument, take points off if it was dirty and he had to put it back in your hand *exactly* where it was, and you didn't say thank you, you didn't nod, didn't do a thing, just had to be so spot on and of course that's well gone. With time, people's haircuts are different, people's livery are different, our attitudes are different.

– Jim Dennis, Ballarat City Band



Here is a diagram from the 1967 South Street program, the year the Soldiers' Band came third in the quickstep.

967. South Street program. Quickstep diagram. Source: BMBB Archive

Norm Newey remembers the quickstep from the Soldiers' Band days:

It was 120 steps and Lyndsay George was spot on with that. That's two beats to the second and he used to start the band off and be spot on. The adjudicator would be running between the lines all the way down. You'd do a right left turn, counter march where you go down the aisles turn back up again and you'd reverse your direction.

Formation: left turns, and straight left turns and wheels and there's all sorts of things. It was good. A wheel is when you go round on the curve but a left turn you go 1, 2, 3 and turn suddenly and you're going at 90 degrees virtually.

– Norm Newey

In 1968 the Soldiers' Band won the 'A' Grade quickstep competition ahead of some of Australia's top brass bands of the time:

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|----------|-----|-----------|
| Ballarat Soldiers' Memorial Band | Ballarat | Victoria | 175 | 1st |
| Footscray-Yarraville City Band | Footscray | Victoria | 174 | Equal 2nd |
| Malvern Municipal Brass Band | Malvern | Victoria | 174 | Equal 2nd |
| Melbourne Fire Brigade | Melbourne | Victoria | 170 | 4th |



1968, The Soldiers' Band won the 'A' Grade for Quickstep.
Source: BMCB Archive

They were quite a prominent contesting band in those days and they were very good marchers because they were all soldiers and so we would win the quickstep competition everywhere we went. I can distinctly remember we won the 'A' grade quickstep and then won our own 'B' grade quickstep so they were quite a disciplined marching band.

It's very much relaxed now, they don't have those competitions, but it was very much army style and the adjudicator was an army drill instructor.

– Kevin Howell

It is interesting to note how closely the experience of playing in the Soldiers' and playing in a military band was at this point in time:

I think really close, very close. I did national service. I didn't get to do the ordinary training, they nabbed me because I was a cornet player. And we went into a very, very good band then and all the same sorts of thing. The same sorts of marching and the same sorts of playing. But very much related to the sort of band the Soldiers' band was.

– Norm Newey

And the diagram for marching was a set program for all the bands. The guards [Royal Guards at Buckingham Palace] do this they go up, and then turn around and you see that and the best example of that is the Edinburgh Tattoo. They still do those things for the discipline of marching. Marching bands heritage is from England.

– Kevin Howell

Marching makes memories

We know what an impact the marching comps had on earlier, long-standing players like the Howells, Norm Newey, Lindsay George, Jimmy Allen, Bob Pattie and Jim Dennis because when they tell the stories about the quickstep, they light up. For South Street, they had one minute, once a year, to prove their precision.



We were taught and we practised. A lot of people can't play an instrument and march or walk so we practised that because if you wanted to march in the band you had to be able to do that. It was quite exhilarating actually, well as a lad you're quite proud, you know a band uniform and the sound gets you too. Yeah, I always enjoyed that.

– Kevin Howell

Visiting Soldiers' band drummer Lyndsay George in the nursing home when his memory was all but faded in the last year of his life, mention of the quickstep brought back vivid memories:

He's the adjudicator, the guy who is counting the paces. You had to do so many paces.

Marching was not confined to the annual South Street quickstep competitions, though. Street marches have been a major part of Ballarat life since the mid 1800s.

Street marches

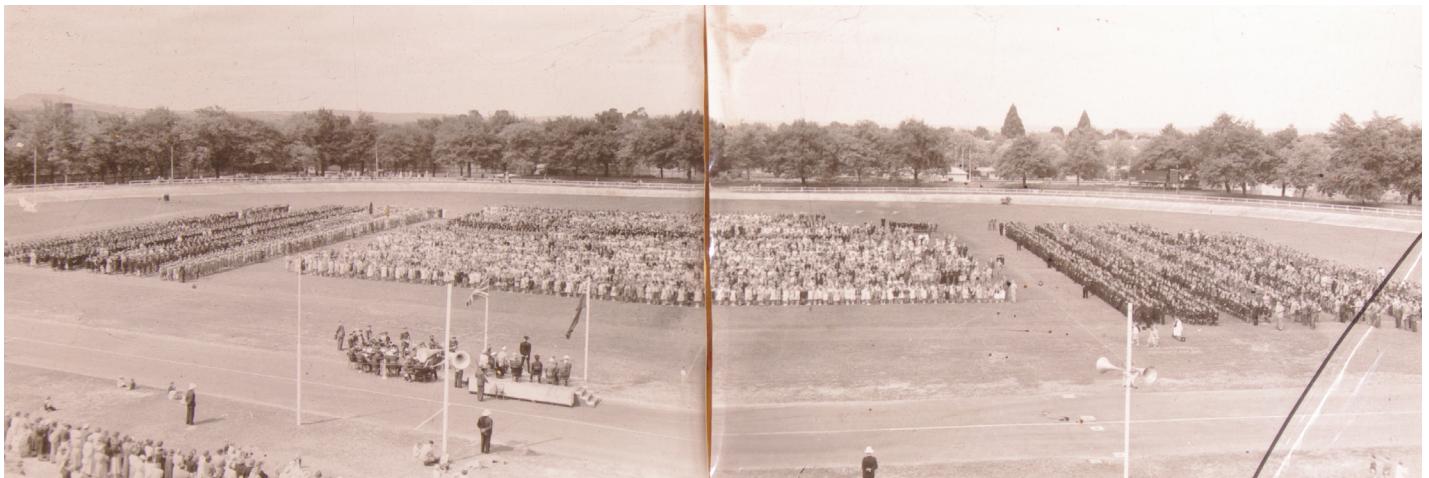


c.1967, Begonia Parade Sturt Street. Source: Max Harris Collection, Ballarat Mechanics' Institute



For the Ballarat Soldiers' Band, the Begonia Festival Parade, ANZAC Day marches, funeral processions, St Patrick's Day, Sunday church marches, civic celebrations such as centenaries and royal visits were all important events, which underpinned the cultural fabric of the city. Street marching lends sobriety, authority and significance to all of these mass social occasions.

Here is an example of a mid century civic gathering on Ballarat's City Oval where the band played for the visit of the Governor-General.



1955, Children's Display, City Oval for visit of Governor-General. Band plays seated next to the officials' stage. Source: BMCB Archive

That is something sadly missing in Ballarat. I see street processions in Ballarat and I get so upset really, no bands march any more.

To hear a band marching down the street in the procession, a brass band there's nothing like it. I loved it. Like Lyndsay George, I loved playing marches. He always loved playing marches. I must have loved it because it was forty to fifty years ago and I could play the cornet still - it would take a while to get a lip again – note for note. I could still remember every note of about twenty marches. That's incredible that I can do that, so I must just have loved playing marches.

– Norm Newey

The Ballarat Begonia march has been reduced and reduced and reduced, extensively so. Originally it started off down Bridge Street [Bridge Mall], all the way up Sturt Street right up to Hamilton Avenue, turn right then march all the way round to where it finished now, round to the sound shell [North Gardens]. Then in the 70s it started at the hospital and it went from the hospital and went right up Sturt Street. Then, around the early 70s it started at the traffic lights at Pleasant Street, and did that for about two years and then it went from Pleasant Street, turn right and down to the lake and march around the lake. Then the next year instead of going from Pleasant Street and Sturt Street there it went from around the lake the next one up, and you marched around the lake, then two years later it went further up to Loreto College, so it was getting shorter and shorter. Now it's like a little doddle of 200 m down the road. It's absolute crap!

The bands should be marching at 120 bpm, well that's pretty fast military marching so you'd drop it back to 110 bpm. Barry Wilkins was pretty good at organising it. But now you've got bloody clowns jumping around, you've got unicycles going in and out, you've got a tractor engine that's going two miles per hour so then you've got a band that's trying to march. So you finish up, instead of doing a 30 inch pace, you get smaller and smaller. You're playing music remember, and you're marching



in time with what you're playing so you can't just slow down the tune, so you end up just marching almost on the spot. City Council is not necessarily aware of this. They haven't set the parameters and the guidelines.

– Jim Dennis, Ballarat City Band

This knowledge of Ballarat banding history speaks to the evolution of the role and practical functioning of the band and how times have changed.

To preserve this tradition and fundamental part of the town's living heritage, the council needs to be on board with the technical aspects of marching bands.

Drum majors



Early 60s, Soldiers' Band, South Street. Frank Rollard (MD), Aub McGregor (Drum Major).
Source: BMCB Archive

The role of drum major is to 'carry the mace, do the inspections, and lead the march because the judges are very pedantic about everybody being in step.'

– Margaret Howell Drum Major, Creswick Brass Band from 2006.

Good ones were coveted, some were tyrants, prizes were given in South Street to the top drum majors. And did I mention that they got to wear the best garb?



Check out the shoulder embellishments, gloves and marching mace:



1962, South Street. J Lowther, L Garrett, W Cockerill, A McGregor, K Howell, G Smith. Source: Geoff Smith Archive

Bryan Crebbin, former Ballarat City Councillor and President of the Soldiers' Band through the 1980s, remembers the silver-haired distinguished-looking drum major leading the mid-twentieth century Soldiers' Band.

I used to look at some of the photos on the walls in the eighties and remember seeing that very distinguished looking man from my early days as a young lad in Ballarat. They were inspiring. It was meaningful. We never had television til later. Those sort of public events were big things and people went to them because they were public events.

A band made a statement at a city or town event: this is something to be proud of, to take notice of. Civic pride was still really embodied in the band at that time.

There were two Highland bands [not merging until c1993 Pattie p. 231] and two brass. There used to be parades from the fire brigade and bands would play in those. There was a fireman's championship. In the 60s there was a big fireman's demonstration across the different brigades and they marched up the Creswick Road to the showgrounds to where the demonstration was at torch light, they held oil lit torches in the dark on poles, with the bands playing for their march.

—Bryan Crebbin



Sometimes the parades would last for an hour with floats and bands passing.

The little spectators' feet would be tapping before they even got to see the bands because they would hear them long before they passed by.

– Keryn Crebbin

Not only does Bryan still hold the excitement of these parade memories all these years later, he also kept the flag that he waved at the Fireman's Parade as a young child.



1952, Fireman's Parade flag. Source: Bryan Crebbin

The VBL still runs drum major training days to keep Victorian bands on their toes (or is it heels?).



The quickstep in Britain

The quickstep, or march contest was a staple part of British contests from the 1870s – well before Ord Hume returned from the antipodes. These contests consisted of one or more of the following components, any or all of which would be assessed and/or scored:

1. Playing the march while marching on the 'road'
2. Playing a 'contest' march while static
3. Deportment (smartness of uniform and precision of marching)

The earliest general band contests consisted of bands playing their own choice of music, usually one or two pieces. Gradually the idea of a 'set test piece' was introduced to the mix of contests. Early performances certainly included the odd march/quickstep as a performance piece.

At the Jesmond contest on 17 May 1869 the music performed was a set march 'Scotch March' and own choice other piece. Combined prizes and placings.

The first separate prize for a quickstep was of £1 at the contest at Mirfield, Yorkshire on 6th August 1870.

At the Rawtenstall Contest on 24th Aug 1872 the fifth prize was awarded to Newchurch (the overall winners) after a quickstep contest to determine it, rather than give it to the fifth placed band, as only 5 bands competed

The first known full quickstep contest was held at Shibden Hall Park, Halifax on 12th July 1873. In addition to the main own-choice test piece contest (won by Linthwaite, 1st prize £25) there was a march contest won by King Cross Band, with prizes of £5, £3 and £1 10s.

Thereafter the quickstep or march contest slowly became a fairly regular aspect of band contests – either as an adjunct to the main competition, or as a separate event in its own right. There are still some being held annually today – e.g. Morley, Brighouse, and not least all the Whit Friday contests in Saddleworth and Tameside.

– Gavin Holman (The Internet Bandsman's Everything Within www.ibew.co.uk)



DISCOVER MORE

Royal South Street results can be searched for by filtering banding results in:
<https://results.royalsouthstreet.com.au/>

A brief history of brass banding at South Street can be found by scrolling down on:
<http://125.royalsouthstreet.com.au/disciplines/>