

The following information was taken from the **DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY - NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER** web page on frequently asked questions.

[Home](#)

[Officers](#)

[Roster](#)

[Final Concert](#)

[USS Arizona, Band 22](#)

[Message Board](#)

[Guestbook](#)

[Life Membership](#)

[Scholarship](#)

[Reunion Photos](#)

[Navy Music History](#)

[Program Notes](#)

[Unit Band Photos](#)

[Photo of the Moment](#)

[Leger Lines Online](#)

[Links](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

While it is impossible to determine exactly when the first Navy band was formed, one of the early recollections of a band was back in 1802 in the Italian port of Messina. A local group of musicians was invited to play aboard a visiting Navy ship. This turned out to be the last they saw of the shore line for some time. The sailors liked their music so well that they forgot to tell the musicians the ship was getting underway.

In 1812 the American frigate United States acquired an eight-piece band of French-Italian musicians who had enlisted aboard a French ship, but were captured by the Portuguese and taken to Lisbon. Here they signed on the British warship Macedonian which was captured by the Americans. The band ended up playing on the decks of the famous ship United States.

Later, many ships, such as the warship Cyane, organized various types of musical units as early as 1820. The crew of Constitution formed a 20-piece band in 1825. By 1827 this unit became the first known Navy band to be formally shipped aboard an American warship.

William Raymond enlisted as a Musician in 1820 at Norfolk, Virginia and received 10 dollars a month for his efforts. Musician James F. Draper signed aboard the frigate Brandywine in July 1825, and had the notation "\$10 a month" entered next to his name in the ship's log. On 31 August 1826, John Page had his rating changed from Seaman to Master of the Band, and in September Ordinary Seaman William Tuton became a Musician, both aboard Constellation. Navy bandsmen were first recognized officially in 1838, when the pay tables of the Navy Register listed the grades of Bandmaster, First and Second Class Musicians. The number of Navy bands fluctuated but gradually increased in succeeding years through the Civil War until the turn of the century, although it appears that no particular method of procurement or training of musicians was practiced.

The first of a series of fleet musician schools was established in 1903 at St. Helena, Virginia in an effort to improve the training and performance of bands in the Navy. In 1935 Lt. Charles Benter, Leader of the Navy Band, Washington, D.C., established a Band School. In 1941 the school was detached from the Navy Band, and became the United States Navy School of Music with Boatswain (later Lieutenant) James Thurmond as the first officer in charge. The Navy School of Music was located in the Washington Navy Yard until early 1943 when it moved across the Anacostia River. It then remained at the Naval Receiving Station, Anacostia, Maryland until 1964 when the school was redesignated as the School of Music, with a Commanding Officer, and moved to its present quarters on the Naval Amphibious Base, Little Creek, Norfolk, Virginia. The School of Music is now a multi-service command which provides training for Army, Navy and Marine Corps Musicians. Today some 14 bands and 1000 enlisted and officer musician personnel serve in the Navy throughout the world.

The following is a photo made into a post card that shows the band from the USS Newark in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The photo was taken in 1910! The tenor sax player on the left is E. A. Parker, the grandfather of Bill Robie, who contributed this great photo.



The Washington Navy Yard Band

A group photo on board USS Henderson (AP-1) showing most of the 35-man contingent from the band that accompanied President Harding to Alaska in 1923. The chief petty

officer on the right is Charles Benter, the group's leader.
The Washington Navy Yard Band was formed in 1916 from the bands of USS *Mayflower* and USS *Kansas*. It was redesignated the United States Navy Band in 1925.

Photo # NH 76082 U.S. Navy Band on board USS Henderson en route to Alaska in 1923



(Photo from the Naval History Command website, submitted by Allen P. Jones)

MUSICIAN RATING HISTORY

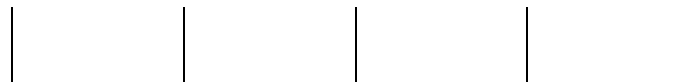
Chief established 1884; changed to First Musician 1893. Pay grade C re-established from Bandmaster 1943. Pay grades 1c and 2c established 1838; pay grade 3c established 1943.

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY - NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER

805 Kidder Breese SE
Washington Navy Yard
Washington, D.C., 20374-5060

Ja-Da

Here's a little-known piece of Navy music history, courtesy of member Grady Oder. The tune *Ja-Da*, famous during WWI and a standard for many years afterward, was written by Bob Carleton, who served as an MU during the Great War! Here are some photos of a special edition of the sheet music that benefitted Navy Relief. Notice the tempo marking!





(Click on thumbnail to see full size)

Sam Donahue's Band of the U.S. Navy Liberation Forces

"The story of Glen Miller's military career is well known, but undeservedly less celebrated is that of the **Band of the U.S. Navy Liberation Forces** led by **Musician 2nd Class Sam Donahue.**"

- Alastair Robertson, Scottish Music Critic

The band was originally led by famous clarinetist and bandleader Artie Shaw who was promoted to Chief Musician shortly after his enlistment in 1942. He was tasked with assembling an all star dance band which included Sam Donahue, trumpet players Max Kaminski (later replaced by Don Jacoby), Johnny Best, Frank Beach and lead man extraordinaire Conrad Gozzo. Many critics consider this to be one of the best, if not the best big band trumpet section ever. Legionary drummer Davey Tough was also in the original band.

After organizing and rehearsing at the Navy School of Music in Anacostia the band was designated Navy Reserve Band 501 but was better know as The Rangers.

The band departed in 1943 for the South Pacific War Zone and played gigs in forward areas such as Guadalcanal and aboard various battleships and carriers. The effects of the tropical climate and enemy action resulted in the band being in a state of near collapse when they returned to Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. Shaw, Kaminski and Tough were granted medical discharges and the leadership of the band fell to MU2 Sam Donahue. Sam then spent time in Washington, DC successfully lobbying naval authorities to continue the band existence.

His first action as leader was to return the entire book to Shaw and do a rewrite with arrangers Dick Jones and Dave Rose along the lines of the Count Basie and Jimmy Lunceford bands. The more commercial Shaw book was replaced with swinging jazz charts that got the attention of the English music critics and jazz lovers in the western part of England. In 1944 the band dodged buzz bombs and an occasional air raid to entertain thousands of the troops headed for the invasion of Europe operating from their homeport in Exeter. In August the band finally made it to London in and played on the BBC, the Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme, the American Red Cross Program and from a studio near Piccadilly Circus the American Eagle in Britain program.

The British music magazine The Melody Maker finally recognized this band was no longer the Artie Shaw Melody Makers "but an entirely different brew served piping hot by Sam Donahue".

The historic head to head meeting of the Glenn Miller Army Air Corp Band and Donahue's hard swinging sailors on September the 21st left little doubt in the minds of those present. In typically understated British terms " . . . it was the consensus of opinion . . . that the blue jackets took the honours." No kidding.

The broadcasts continued until March 1945 when the band returned to New York City. Here they recorded a series of "V Discs" for producer George Simon and then transferred to Los Angeles and was billed as the AFRS (Armed Forces Radio Station) Orchestra.

On December 22, Sam was finally promoted to Musician First Class and discharged "leaving behind a legacy of recordings of one of the greatest swing bands of all time" according to Scottish jazz critic Alastair Robertson.

Sam taught arranging at the Navy School of Music and wrote several of the Navy Specials,

charts many of the older of us are very familiar with. "The Ivory Tower Blues" was one of his better-known charts in the fleet, the ivory tower in question was the raised portion of the old school where auditions were held. One of his students was the late Gene Huddleston.

Sam was born March 8, 1918 in Detroit, Michigan and passed away March 22, 1974 in Reno, Nevada of complications due to cancer.

"It is now fifty years since the Navy Band set up for business in Britain as part of the greatest combined (military) operation in history. Memories of those dramatic days are beginning to fade like the photos of young soldiers, sailors and airmen awaiting their departure for France, but these performances are alive with the same vitality and optimism as they had all those years ago."

Alastair Robertson 1994 describing the two CD's available of Sam's Navy Band:

Sam Donahue Directing The Band of the U.S. Navy Liberation Forces

"Convoy- 1945- Volume One" HEP CD 2 mono

Sam Donahue Directing The Band of the U.S. Navy Liberation Forces

"LST Party - 1945 - Volume 2"

Available at:

http://www.full-albums.net/albums_review-Sam+Donahue+&+His+Orchestra.asp

Anchors Aweigh History

SeaBee Bands

Filipino Musicians in the Navy



Page last modified: 04/18/2011

Send mail to admin@navymusicians.org with questions or comments about this web site.

The Navy Musicians Association is a 501 (c) (19) tax exempt veteran's organization under the U.S. Tax Code.