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Race & Business in Detroit:
Schemes, Dreams and Dismay

Sunday

The Lone Ranger's Son
On Dad and the Ponies

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Camaraderie. I guess that's what does it. It does it in the Marines, so why not the Michigan Marching Band? I know that's one of the reasons I joined the band my freshman year at the University of Michigan. Plus the fact that ever since I was (Turn to Page 12)

Are You Proud (Shuffle Shuffle) to Be a (Yuba! Yuba!) Michigan Bandsman? Ladies (Hiss Hiss) Need Not Apply



Well, there they are, the *FINEST BAND IN THE LAND*, tooting away while (below) extracurricular activities proceed apace on the sunny sidelines.

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nine, it was drummed into my head by television, by teachers in elementary and high school, and by gum-chewing marching band fanatics of the 40s and 50s, that the Michigan Band was and is *THE FINEST* band in the whole U.S.A.

I've run into many bandsmen during my four years at Michigan. They all wear the same jacket; the heart side of the chest stuck out just a little farther than the other side; the same glassy look in their eyes; their heads just a little further up. I've talked to these "Men of Michigan" as they are called, and we've reminisced over the shows, the dance steps, the painful drill sessions, and the blaring badgerings of Dr. William D. Revelli, ex-director of the Michigan Marching Band; affectionately referred to as "Chief," derisively laughed at as "the bald headed cab driver."

William D. Revelli is a short man, bald, quick tempered, with an eye and ear for perfection, (which misses mistakes just as conveniently as it spots them), a rotund body, a heart that beats for the American Way, but most of all for "his boys:" the 182 Marching Men of Michigan.

Assisting Dr. Revelli all those years was George B. Cavender, the drill instructor and originator of many of the band's ingenious marching patterns and dances.



Cover and photography by *BARRY BATES*

He is the band's director this year, a position, say many bandsmen, that Cavender should have had in the first place.

It's hard to say what made me try out for the band. I certainly wasn't athletic; I had never marched before; I hated football. But I *DID* want respect. I expected respect from girls; I expected girls to "flip" over the fact that I was a "Man of Michigan."

I went to the organizational meeting of the Michigan Marching Band which is held "traditionally" (almost everything in the band is based upon some obscure tradition that no one except Revelli really understands) on the day before class registration. I arrived slightly late, unaware of one of the band's many stock cliches: *TO BE EARLY IS TO BE ON TIME.*

The meeting was held in Harris Hall, one of the oldest buildings on the U. of M. campus. The walls are covered with ancient photographs of every Marching Band show ever performed. On the bottom of each layout is an identical photo of Dr. Revelli and George B. Cavender, both wearing conductor's uniforms, both staring out at some unseen object; eyes squinting, their faces wearing an expression of perfectionist genius and inspiration, and God only knows when the picture was taken.

Dr. Revelli opened the meeting by claiming that he was Dr. Revelli and no, he was not standing on his knees (he is quite short). This remark was met by a burst of laughter and applause. Dr. Revelli beamed knowingly. He wore a baseball cap which bore the letter "C" on its front, standing for either Chief or Cab Driver depending on everyone's mood.

"Well, men," Revelli began, "I want to welcome all of you to the finest band in the land." *Loud cheering and shuffling of feet.* "As you know, tryouts are tomorrow, and then we have a really busy schedule. Our team is going to be great this year —" *Loud cheering, applause and shuffling of feet once more.* "I see a lot of new faces here today, and that makes me happy. You new people are going to find that the Michigan Band is one of the most rewarding experiences you will ever have in your life." *Shuffling of feet only.* I began to get curious about the shuffling of feet. I was also aware that almost everyone looked bigger and older than me.

"I've been directing this band for over thirty years now, and I know I'VE enjoyed every minute of it; the parades, the formations, the dances, and even though it's been thirty years, I'll tell you men something; that first moment of every pre-game show, when you run out of that stadium tunnel out onto that field gives me the same thrill that I had when I first saw it. I never get tired of it" *shuffle shuffle*, "and I don't think that any of you will." *Shuffle shuffle CHEER.* Of course he was referring to the famous Michigan Band entry; that neck-breakingly fast drum cadence, 182 marching men charging out onto the field; always welcomed by the roar of the crowd.

"I've seen faces come and go." My face itched but I was afraid to scratch it. "And it's a strange but wonderful thing." Dr. Revelli ran his hand over his bald head and squinted his eyes. "We have a spirit here. I think you know what I mean. This meeting is the only time in the year when we talk about it. I don't have to tell you. I never tell you to have spirit. No one tells you to have spirit. But it's here. It's always been here," *shuffle shuffle*, "and I think it's WONDERFUL! There's a sense of competition in this band, I think you'll find. Ranks compete with other ranks, instruments compete with other instruments, and we're all, each one of us, striving to be the best. And by doing so, this whole band becomes the best. Because we are THE FINEST BAND IN THE LAND!" *Shuffle Shuffle CHEER!* I was impressed by all the spirit.

"Now this doesn't mean that we rest on our laurels." A hush, and the faces of the bandsmen became very serious. Cavender, sitting in his chair at the front of the room squinted his eyes as he looked us over. "We still have to work to be the finest. And remember our motto, men. We're not as good as but . . ."

"BETTER THAN" shouted the band in unison.

"That's right. We ARE better than any band in the land. But that's because every one of us cares. We're all MEN here." There are in fact, no women in the Michigan Marching Band.

"I've talked to parents of bandsmen, and they all say the same thing. They say that something has happened to their boy. A change. Something about the way he moves. Their heads are held a little higher, and they walk a little straighter," *shuffle shuffle*, "and their chests stick out just a little further than before. I think you know what I mean. You just can't help sticking

your chest out further and holding your head up higher when you know you're part of THE FINEST BAND IN THE LAND!" *Deafening, deafening cheer, people clapping each other on the shoulders*, and the freshmen are looking around, smiling shyly, trying to figure out what all the shuffling of feet is about.

"Well, I hope you all make it, you new men." It's inevitable. I've never heard of anyone NOT making it to the Michigan Band. But that's supposed to be a secret. Traditional.

"But I think I've said enough. I'll be saying plenty more this year, don't you worry about that." *Gentle laughter and shuffling of feet.* "I better be saying plenty, men, unless you want Michigan State to have a better band than us!" *Loud hissing, and laughter.* The main threat of the year. How many times on the drill field do they say "State's picking their feet up higher than you guys" to get incentive. And when that game was over, they'd hold Ohio State over our heads, but we'd always be the best; always the finest.

"All right, then," Revelli went on. "Here's a fellow who's been waiting to talk to you. We all know him. We all love him. My assistant director, your drill instructor, "The Whistle," George B. Cavender . . ." *Loudest cheering and applause*, and George B. Cavender came up to the podium. Dark, tough looking, LOUD voice, wore a baseball cap that had an "M" on it, a whistle around his neck, skin like leather, a tall man, a powerful looking man, squinty eyes of perfection and he shouted: "OK BAND. GIVE ME A YUBA!"

"Yuba!" shouted the band.

"What?" Cavender bent his head as if he didn't hear.

"YUBA!!"

"What??"

"YUBAAAAAAA YAYYYYYYYY!"

"OK, men. Now I know that all the freshmen are looking at each other, and saying to themselves, what the heck is Yuba? Well, it's part of a tradition here, and I think the longer you're here, the more you'll understand. But actually, what it is, it's kind of the band's own private cheer. You see, years ago, I gave a command to the band, which somehow didn't get heard. All the band heard was the word 'Yuba' and no one knew what the command meant, and it wasn't till later that we got the whole mess straightened out. Well, the joke stuck, and we've kept that cheer ever since. I think we're all rather fond of it here." His voice became soft just then, and he looked almost gentle to my innocent eyes. Feet *shuffled* gently, and George started talking again.

"Well, men" (Always men) "tomorrow are tryouts, and after that, we start rehearsing. I see we've got a lot of new men with us today. All right. Old Men! On your feet!" And in one split second, the old bandsmen were on their feet, standing perfectly at attention, eyes front, chest out, heads up, proud!

"New men, these are the old men. You will be working with these men. They are good men. They've marched with Michigan before and they will be able to show you the right way to march. These are good men; these are Michigan Men! All right. Old men, down!" And in another split second the old bandsmen sat down, completely at ease.

"All right!" New men! On your feet!" Creek, creek,

one, two, three seconds and we finally made it, not at attention, not at all sure of ourselves, greeted by a loud ominous, angry hiss from the old bandsmen. I saw for the first time that the boy sitting next to me was also a freshman.

"New men, you're going to be a part of the finest band in the land. You are going to be drilling with the old men, and we're going to teach you how to march, how to play, how to stand, but most of all, we're going to teach you how to be a MAN." *Shuffling of feet* from the old men. "Sometimes that takes five minutes. Sometimes a half hour. Sometimes two weeks. But when that first game comes up, you will all be men. All right! New men, down!" Down we went. I wondered what the hell it all meant. What were they going to do to me on that practice field?

"Well, I've said just about all I want to say, so now here's someone who wants to talk to you. You've known him and loved him for the three years he's been with Michigan: Drum Major, Dick Follet!" *Large applause, cheers, shuffling of feet*, and a few more words about spirit from Dick Follet, who as drum major of the finest band in the land, was logically the finest man in the land.

"Michigan is not as good as but . . ."

"BETTER THAN!" shouted the band in return to the drum major's use of the most famous cliché in the land.

And so it went. They passed out song sheets to all the new men, so we could sing some school songs; all part of getting in the spirit. We sang *The Victors*, Michigan's fight song which made the freshman next to me sing his heart out.

"Something always happens to me whenever I hear that song," he explained to me through wet eyes.

We sang "I'll Ne'er Forget my College Days" a nostalgic old college song, whose words I can only remember the first two lines of: "I'll ne'er forget my college days/My dear sincere old college days." The men in the band snickered as they sang it, not because they thought the words were schmaltzy, but because they were other words to it, sung only when Revelli was not around: "I'll ne'er forget my William D./That dear sincere old S.O.B." I also have forgotten the rest of the words to that.

TRYOUTS WEREN'T HALF as hard as I thought they would be; as I said before, everyone makes it. And the same day, I found out what the shuffling of feet was all about. It meant approval, as opposed to hissing, which meant disapproval. Everything has a purpose in the band.

George Cavender led the drilling. He was resourceful, and brilliant in the way he could get 182 men to do what he wanted them to do. He wasn't half the ornery sergeant I had thought he would be.

"That fellow in the 12th rank did it wrong. That's why you're doing it again, men. This is what is known as social pressure." And he'd laugh, and we'd do it again.

"Your attention is lousy, men. Drill the position of attention!"

Dick Follet would call the band to attention. George would squint his eyes and say: "Feet!"

"TOGETHER!" the band would shout.

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