


"Bones," 1992, at DCI in Madison, WI (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

by Bob Fields

The merger that became the world-famous Crossmen came about when two established corps decided they wanted to shoot for stardom.

In 1973, the Keystone Regiment of Newtown, PA, had won the class B championships at the World Open in Boston.

Later that year at the same show, the John Wesley Cross 507 Hornets of Norwood took third at the Eastern States Championships, while the Keystone Regiment placed second.

But things were not going well for either corps internally. With administrative and staff problems cropping up, a series of meetings was set up secretly with the goal of merging the two units. One of those meetings was held at the home of my father-in-law, Bob Booth, and after two months of serious talks, it was agreed to try a merger.

The first rehearsal of the new corps was in September 1974 at the Boeing Helicopter Plant in Ridley Township near the Philadelphia Airport. Later known as "Boeing

Crossmen

parades. Named after the John Wesley Cross American Legion Post 507 in Norwood, the Crossmen could well have been a second choice name like the Devil Dogs, Black Hawks or the Yankee Minutemen.

In 1975, the Crossmen of Delaware County fielded their first competing corps. Director Robbie Robinson and his wife, Charlotte, mortgaged their house for the \$3,500 needed for the gray Maytag repairman uniforms. In their first year of competition, the Crossmen worked hard to solidify their new corps and to try to put the merger in the past.

They won the Eastern States Championships and made associate membership at DCI in nearby Philadelphia by placing 24th with a score of 68.80.

In 1976, the corps experimented with many musical styles, including classical, jazz and even Spanish. They came out aggressively and were the big news of the year, but that news was eclipsed by their disqualification from DCI that August for marching overage members.

On the first organized DCI southern tour, the corps sparkled at its first show in Sevierville, TN. The members were elated to learn later they had won the show, but they were not allowed to see their judges' sheets. Instead, they were hit with the overage member rule.

Many other corps felt the overage disqualification, too, as overnight many corps had large gaps in their drills. Yet this adversity helped to unite the corps at all levels. The balance of the tour included

Beach" the first meeting sported 160 kids from the two corps.

The new corps settled into winter rehearsals in Newtown Square and was soon marching in

performing exhibitions at Walt Disney World, winning the Eastern States Championships and winning the American Legion State Championships.

During that first DCI southern tour, the corps appeared in exhibition for a local Atlanta TV station. The station authorities were so impressed that they decided to form their own corps. Thus, Spirit of Atlanta, now known as Spirit of JSU, was formed and a



Crossmen, 1976 (photo by Jane Boulen from the collection of Drum Corps World).

long friendship began between the two groups.

In 1977, the Crossmen returned to the field with a new enthusiasm. They did two tours and finished fifth at the DCI East Championships in Allentown, PA, as well as at the CYO Nationals in Boston and the World Open in Massachusetts.

They took first at the Pennsylvania American Legion Championships and won the Denver American Legion National Championships. *Russian Christmas Music* was first premiered that year and became a corps tradition. The corps finished 11th at DCI Finals with a score of 81.30.

In 1978, the Crossmen changed uniforms from gray to stylish black tops using red capes. Musically, they leaned toward jazz. During their rendition of *Something*, by the Beatles, what is said to be the first real dancing occurred on a drum corps field.

They toured to Colorado and up to Canada. Their new feeder corps, the Iron Cross, premiered for kids aged seven to 15, but only lasted until 1980 due to lack of money.

The Crossmen finished sixth at DCI East, fifth at CYO Nationals, sixth at DCI Midwest and sixth at DCI Prelims. At DCI Finals, they were ninth with a score of 82.45.

That same year, the skull and cross bones flag appeared for the first time and the name "Bones" was attached to it. The story of Bones started at DCI East with the first appearance of a lone figure, in a Crossmen uniform and a skull mask, wearing a cape, as the corps warmed up during



Crossmen, 1977, at the National Dream in Jersey City, NJ (photo by Elinn Cetaratti from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Crossmen, June 3, 1978, in Bayonne, NJ (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).

prelims.

Originally called "the Spook," later "the Fantom," but today simply called "Bones," it makes an appearance at major shows to rally the corps. It is said to be the spirit of the alumni and it is the glue that binds together those Crossmen who have marched throughout the years.

In 1979, the Crossmen headed west to California, traveling along roads with their sister corps, Spirit of Atlanta. On their way to Salt Lake City, Spirit's equipment truck went off the road. With the help of the Crossmen members, Spirit's equipment was loaded on the Crossmen buses.

Later, when the Crossmen had to leave two of their non-repairable buses along the road, Spirit invited the Crossmen to ride three to a seat on the way home. Each year Spirit of JSU continues to give the Spirit of Crossmen Award to individuals who have given of themselves, in Crossmen tradition, within the Spirit organization.

Hosting the Eastern States Championship that year, the Crossmen won by a wide margin. They finished 13th at DCI Prelims with a score of 81.70 and was the first and only corps to be crowned champions at the associate championship.

In 1980, the Crossmen won their fifth Eastern States Championship, took fifth at DCI Midwest, second at the Dream contest, eighth at DCI East and eighth at DCI Finals.

During the summer of 1981, the corps made DCI Finals in Montreal where it placed eighth with an 86.5. The corps later won the VFW National Championship in Philadelphia and the last Eastern States circuit title.

During the 1982 season, the corps played

Artistry in Rhythm and Russian Christmas Music.

However, some in the judging community felt the corps was stuck in a musical rut with the jazz format and suggested changes.

They were seventh at



Crossmen, 1985 (photo by Bill Dixon from the collection of Drum Corps World).

DCI Finals, even though they beat Garfield at DCI East by three points.

In 1983, the judging community suggested more credit should be given for difficulty and urged the corps to perform more challenging music. They turned to "Overture to

Ludmilla," *Concerto de Aranjuez* and *Russian Christmas Music*. The Crossmen suddenly found themselves being beaten by many corps performing much easier pieces of music.

Robinson found the difficulty points were not being given, because a decision had been made earlier in the year to only reward those things that were accomplished well, not just for difficulty.

The corps made its second trip to California and cleaned the show every day on tour to no avail. At DCI Finals in Miami, they finished 13th.

The kids were said to be devastated and many

vowed not to return the following year. As a result, the 1984 Crossmen had fewer than 20 horns and few guard at winter rehearsals. DCI sent a representative to one of the early camps and reported back that the corps was unmarketable. Still, the corps pressed on and took the field despite its small size.

The audience absolutely loved them. In just a few nights they brought their score up 15 points and by the end of the season, they made finals, finishing 10th.

In 1985, staff members Mike Dennis, Earl Stover and Tom Campbell kept the corps together. The judges continued telling the Crossmen staff they needed a new identity. The idea of going to a Spanish style was not new, since other corps had tried it, including



Crossmen, August 10, 1984, in Bloomfield, NJ (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Crossmen, 1989 (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).

the California Dons, San Jose Raiders and Muchachos. Even the Blue Devils had considered it.

The uniform became a Spanish gaucho look with Hostess cupcake swirls down the arms. The Spanish music was on track, but did not catch on with fans or judges. At DCI, the corps finished 17th.

During the winter of 1985-1986, the corps was again plagued by small turnouts. One winter camp yielded just nine horns players. Robinson finally decided it was time to

fold the corps and the alumni stepped forward to buy it.

During the 1986 season, Steve Richelli became director, with Earl Stover as assistant director. By summer they still had a very small horn line and were questioning if they should even field a corps. When the Bayonne Bridgemen folded at the end 1985, many of their drummers came to Crossmen, but the corps still needed horns and guard.

They were late coming out that year. With only 17 horns, they scored in the low 30s at their first show. They recruited heavily and managed to fill up some spots. Eventually they headed to DCI in Madison with 110 members and with very few instructors, finishing 21st in prelims.

In 1987, the corps moved to Newark, DE, and Scott Litzenburg became director. They started the season with 44 horns. With the help of some popular tunes, the corps finished in 16th place at DCI.

For 1988, the rebuilding program was working well and the corps continued to do more jazz pieces like *Cherokee* by Rob McConnell and a jazz version of *Summertime*. They finished 14th at DCI Championships.

In 1989, Carl Ruocco, former assistant director of the Star of Indiana, became the Crossmen's director. The corps was gaining financial stability and volunteers were getting behind the program. They had a good staff, a great musical program and even some corporate sponsorship.

Music was by the New York Voices. They had a strong drum line and they bought some newly approved three-valve bugles and new uniforms, continuing the look of black jackets with white pants and shoes. They finished 12th.

The 1990 season had a full corps and they beat Madison and Bluecoats, playing *Baroque Samba*, *'Round Midnight*, the



Crossmen, July 9, 1995, in Medford, NJ (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Song, *River Music*, *Freida* and *Anthem for Humanity* and still had a successful season, finishing eighth at DCI Finals.

In 1994, they were U.S. Open Champions with selections from "Suite Children" including *Land of Make Believe* and *Songs for the Planet Earth*. They tied for seventh place at DCI Finals.

The 1995 season saw the Crossmen play a very unusual piece called *The School for Scandal* including *Overture Symphony for Brass and Percussion*. They finished 10th at DCI.

In 1996, the corps did a show called "Voices of Jazz," which included *The Sultan Fainted*, *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square* and *Birdland*. This was also the year Youth Education in the Arts! took over the corps on paper. They finished eighth at DCI.

In 1997, the Crossmen had their first combined YEA! camp with the Cadets of Bergen County. That year they had a small horn line, yet they achieved their highest score, tying Madison in quarterfinals for fifth. Their "Colors of Jazz" show featured *Birdland*, *Sunshine* and *Niner-Two*. The members were thrilled when the crowd gave them a standing ovation as they marched onto the field for



Crossmen, 1992, at DCI in Madison, WI (photo by Sid Unser from the collection of Drum Corps World).

famous *Caravan* and *Now or Never*. They were headed up, finishing seventh at DCI Finals.

In 1991, the Crossmen beat the Blue Devils and tied the Cadets of Bergen County at DCI East with their exciting Pat Metheny show, including *Minuano*, *Dream of the Return* and *Third Wind*. They were Drum Corps East Champions and at DCI Finals they

remembered as a favorite. At DCI Finals, the Crossmen placed sixth. Ruocco resigned following the season.

At the start of the 1993 season, the corps had serious financial problems. DCI fronted them money, which helped them take the field that year, and Jim Coates became director. They played *Fanfare for the Common Man*, *Afro-Brasilia*, *Koto*



Crossmen, August 13, 1997, at DCI in Orlando, FL (photo by Dan Scafidi from the collection of Drum Corps World).

came in eighth.

The 1992 show became one of their most popular music themes. "Songs for the Planet," like the corps' 1997 show, will long be

finals, where they took sixth place.

In 1998, the corps did a show called "Pat Metheny Portrait." Their well-known burgundy buses helped get them to Colorado that year, but caused them breakdown problems along the way. They finished seventh at DCI.

For 1999, they received the "High Color Guard" award at DCI East, even though the corps came in fifth. At DCI Finals, they were 10th.

The 2000 Crossmen had a new director, Jeff Bridges, to start off the turn of the century. New staff members Dean Musson (brass caption head) and Chuck Naffier (horn arranger) helped bring more



(Above) Crossmen, August 13, 1998, at DCI in Orlando, FL (photo by Dan Scafidi from the collection of Drum Corps World); (below) Crossmen, 2001 (photo by David Rice from the collection of Drum Corps World).



sophistication to their music. Naffier brought his solid jazz arrangements and a closet full of wild Hawaiian shirts, while Musson brought the horn line to new technical levels.

Crowds loved their show of *In the Mood*, *Caravan*, *Nobody Does Me Like You Do* and their second corps trademark song, *Birdland*. They were ninth at DCI Finals.

In 2001, there was a percussion head change with the talented Lee Beddis of Canada bringing the next level of sophistication to the drum line. The Crossmen had always been known for having one of the best drum lines, as seen earlier when Thom Hannum and Mark Thurston headed the lines.

It was a year to remember, with the buses

(Left) Crossmen, 2002 (photo by David Rice from the collection of Drum Corps World).

breaking down so often that the horn line had seven different buses during the summer. The 2003 drum major, Becky Terry, commented, "The horn line managed to kill them all!" The corps members once again became very close with Spirit of JSU. They finished seventh at DCI Finals.

In 2002, Musson became caption head of the horn line and later director. The corps broke in new B-flat horns. They also had a new visual caption head, Darryl Pemberton from The Cadets. The Crossmen finished the season in ninth place at DCI.

The 2003 season started with much anticipation and more great charts by Chuck Naffier. Music will include *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, *Welcome to St. James Place*, *Blue Rondo a la Turk* and *Count Bubba*. Once again the corps' heavyweight, upbeat jazz show should have fans giving standing ovations as the Crossmen enter the field.

The one constant through every generation of the corps is Bones, which means something different to each former marching member. Without a doubt, Bones is the one thing that binds the history and tradition of what the Crossmen are today.



Bob Fields has been on the staff of Drum Corps World for more than 26 years, writing the "What's Happening Column," taking pictures and doing special articles.

He started his drum corps career in the 1960s with the Richmond, CA, Hawks on soprano, later playing tenor drum.

Fields was a professional musician for 10 years, playing drums with popular club rock bands in Northern California. He married former Crossmen rifle Terry Booth in 1984. They lived in the Bay Area before moving east in 1989 to Folsom, PA, where they make their home. Their daughter, Leighann, marches winter guard for Apex Youth Services from Wilmington, DE, and is planning on being a Crossmen member soon.

Fields became business manager of the Archer-Epler Junior Musketeers, later called Illusion of Delaware County. He helped with the resurrection of the Garden State Circuit, serving as secretary for several years. He was a show sponsor of 11 shows.

Over the years, Fields has worked in many capacities, including tour manager for the Sacramento Freelancers and Beatrix from Holland. He has driven bus for many of the corps on the West Coast on national tours.

Currently, he serves as show coordinator for the United States Scholastic Band Association shows in the fall and as Crossmen's winter camp director. He also volunteers with Drum Corps International each summer, helping run regional and championships shows. In 1997, Fields won the Friends of DCI Volunteer of the Year Award. He is purchasing manager for a manufacturing facility near Philadelphia.