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## by Kathy and Beth Myers

### Rule Britannia and Greensleeves

The memory of these two songs can foster the image of no other organization than the Guardsmen from Schaumburg, IL. For those who wore the unique British-themed uniforms or played those now-familiar tunes, the memories have not faded.

The Guardsmen gained the

majority of its members from a core area, the suburbs of Chicago. Hailed as the "Cinderella" corps of 1976 due to its remarkable leap in score to make DCI Finals for the first time in the corps' history, its members enjoyed their experiences in small competitions in Illinois and Wisconsin as well as national contests in major cities.

During its 33-year existence (1961-1993), this corps not only made DCI Finals four times (1976, 1978, 1979 and 1980), but also filmed a commercial for Kentucky Fried Chicken in 1976 that aired across the nation.

### The beginnings

The Guardsmen were founded in 1961 by a local VFW post in Mt. Prospect, IL. Following in the steps of many young corps of the era, the goal of the organization was to provide a youth activity that promoted music, good citizenship and proper moral character.

The corps participated in local civic activities such as parades, fund-raisers and community appearances. During the 1960s, the corps grew and started competing in local competitions throughout the Midwest, occasionally participating in VFW contests.

### The British are coming! The British are coming!

In the early 1970s, the corps adopted a marked British theme that was further exemplified in their music. *Rule Britannia* was first played by the Guardsmen in 1972 and quickly became a favored warm-up piece that identified and unified the corps.

The theme to the popular television show

"Masterpiece Theater" was played in 1973, further delineating the British image the corps was developing. In 1974, *Rule Britannia* returned as part of the field show along with *Procession of the Nobles*, a regal tune that delighted audiences.

### A fallen angel

During the winter of 1975-1976, when the corps was gearing up for one of its most successful seasons, tragedy struck. Denise Tomaszewski, a young color guard member with a vibrant personality and quick smile,



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

died of cancer. It was a shock to everyone involved with the corps. Members of the Guardsmen stood at attention on either side of the casket during her entire wake and she was buried in her uniform with the corps playing softly in the background.

The 1976 season was dedicated to her, and before every competition, the members of the corps gathered for prayer and remembrance.

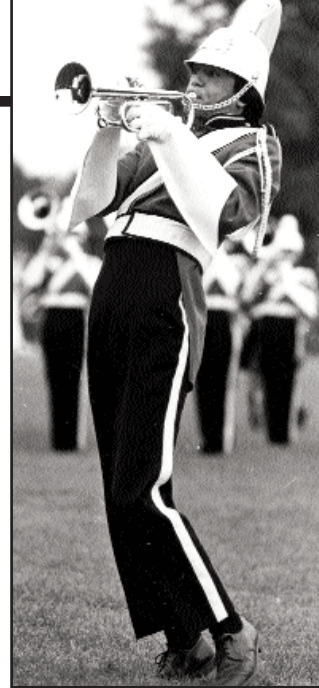
### The Cinderella corps of 1976

Placing no higher than 31st in previous

DCI Prelims, it was a stunning achievement when the corps finished 12th at the 1976 show in Philadelphia. A local paper in Illinois reported the good news: "The Guardsmen of Hoffman Estates-Schaumburg has been

acclaimed the 12th best corps of its kind in the nation. The honors came Saturday night in Philadelphia where 26,000 people jammed the stands to watch the 1976 Drum Corps International Finals.

"In 1975, the Guardsmen took 31st place in DCI. Of almost 2,000 drum corps in the



Guardsmen, 1977 (photo by Dick Deihl from the collection of Drum Corps World).

the Guardsmen for the first time as they took the field with the top echelon in the drum and bugle corps world."

### Thank goodness for Kentucky Fried Chicken

During 1976, the corps was contacted by the Leo Burnett Advertising Agency to star in a Kentucky Fried Chicken commercial. The agency's representatives said the orange color of the Guardsmen uniforms complimented the color scheme of the company and, when a commercial was written that featured a "marching band," the Guardsmen Drum and Bugle Corps was a perfect choice.

On a tree-lined estate in Barrington Hills, IL, the corps spent two days in the hot sun running drill sets over and over again to perfect the moves needed for the advertisement. All eyes were on Col. Sanders as he signed one of the corps' bass drums after the filming was complete.

Featured on national television, the commercials aired in 15-, 30- and 60-second

Guardsmen, 1978 (photo by Dick Deihl from the collection of Drum Corps World).



United States and Canada, 232 competed in the two-day preliminary trials. The Guardsmen scored an 83.75 in the prelims, tying for 10th place.

"Channel 11 (PBS) carried the four-hour spectacular in the Midwest, allowing millions of people to hear and see

time slots. Most of the members used the small checks they received for performing to help with dues that year. The actors who starred in the commercial received significantly more!

### Championship guard

With the competitive winter guard circuit flourishing, the Guardsmen found their niche among the best of the

activity. Transferring their unmistakable British marching style and precision guard work from the field to the gymnasium floor, the Guardsmen quickly became known as the guard to beat on the WGI Midwest circuit.

*Parade of the Wooden Soldiers* and the *Olympic Theme* were soon associated with the guard in the black busbies who held their heads high.

### The little Brits

The corps was also successful in supporting a feeder corps. The Guardsmen Cadets competed in the local Midwest circuit with their counterparts from the Cavaliers, Kilties, Madison Scouts and Phantom Regiment. As the older corps gained success in the 1976 through 1979 seasons, so did their little brothers and sisters. A winter guard also blossomed out of the cadet corps.

### Continued success at DCI

After the exciting year in 1976, the corps failed to make 1977 DCI Finals in Denver, CO. Taking 16th in prelims, the corps left Denver



Guardsmen, 1979 (photo by from the collection of Drum Corps World).

feeling down, but not out. The corps returned to DCI in 1978 with a field show re-dedicated to their British image and with their second uniform makeover in as many years. They were determined to prove the 1976 appearance in Philadelphia was not a fluke. They bettered 1976's 12th-place finish by one spot, placing 11th in 1978.

It was also that year that the now-famous,



Guardsmen, 1985 (photo by Donald Mathis from the collection of Drum Corps World).

extra-tall shakos replaced the white helmets previously donned by the corps.

In 1979, the Guardsmen hit their peak, placing seventh at DCI Finals. The corps wowed audiences with a blazing rendition of *Tiger of San Pedro* and *Greensleeves*. In 1980, the corps returned to the 12th-place spot. Despite attempts to return to the national ranks, the Guardsmen placed 15th in 1981 and 32nd in 1982.

### Financial strains prove too much

Unfortunately, the Guardsmen could not keep up with the financial commitments necessary to remain a competitive corps and marched their last

season in 1990. The cadet corps enjoyed a brief rebirth in 1992-1994, but it ultimately folded as well.

With the help of colorful streamers swirling around a maypole with strains of *Greensleeves* played in true "old drum corps closer" fashion, the Guardsmen found their way into the hearts

of the crowds. Those who marched in the orange and black will always remember friendships and wonderful times. Even today, when they hear the beginning chords of *Hail Britannia* they can't help but think, "The British are coming! The British are coming!"



Guardsmen Cadets, 1993 (photo by Ron Walloch from the collection of Drum Corps World).



*Kathy Myers played French horn with the Guardsmen from 1972-1978. She is a registered nurse and a medical learning consultant with American Family Insurance.*

*Her two boys, Chris and Jeremy, are grown and on their own. She lives with her two teenage daughters, Bethany and Katie, in Waupun, WI, and is a member of the Kilties mellophone section.*

*Beth Myers marched in the Guardsmen Cadets from 1972-1976 and Guardsmen "A" corps in 1977. She lives in Waupun, WI, and works in Madison as a transcription supervisor at the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics.*



*After a 25-year absence from drum corps, Myers rediscovered her love of marching and is now part of the Kilties' mellophone section. She enjoys marching beside her sister, Kathy; her fiancé, Dan; and her son, Joey. She also has two daughters, Heather and Allison.*



Guardsmen, 1979 (photo by Steve Evans from the collection of Drum Corps World).