

Evolution of the Bugle

Evolution of the North American Competition Bugle 1968 through 1980

Legalization of the G-F Bugle

The integration of secondary rotary pistons with multitudes of loop lengths complicated arrangements and adaptation for musicians to some degree. As a result, the environment seemed right for a bugle with a primary full-step piston loop. There were many obvious advantages for corps to utilize the "G-F" bugle although the governing bodies were at first unwilling to approve the change.

The American Legion and Veterans for Foreign Wars (VFW) maintained strict control over the competing drum corps during the late 1960s. However, these governing bodies were seldom staffed with knowledgeable musicians. Instead, those entrusted with the direction of drum corps often placed the activity with other duties such as dictating flag "codes" and "motorcycle field competitions." Recognizable names in the drum corps realm including Jim Jones, Zigmant Kanstul, Larry McCormick, Don Warren, and many others expended great effort to convince the Legion of the importance of adopting the "G-F" piston.



This photograph from the late 1970s shows a G-F piston mellophone bugle (an F.E. Olds model) with a half-step rotor.

Arguably the most drastic change to ever occur to drum corps was approved by the American Legion Supervisory Committee in October 1967. This rule, also adopted by the National Band and Drum Corps Committee of the VFW, permitted the "G-F" bugle to be used by competing corps beginning in 1968.

G-F Bugle, Timpani, Timbale Ok....V.F.W.

(Editors note: The following is a portion of the text found on the PRESSPAGE under the heading of the Veteran of Foreign Wars, and signed by A. J. Schlechta, Chairman of the Nat'l Band and Drum Corps Committee, V.F.W.)

We shall approve for our National Contests the use of the new Bugle pitched to the Key of G, that may be played in the additional key of D or F - in short the G-F Bugle now being offered on the market.

In addition, we shall also approve the use of the Individual Timpani which must be carried by the player, as well as the Timbales.

VFW's approval of the G-F Bugle heralded the most significant change in the competition bugle since the 1930s. From the United States Canadian Drum Corps News, February 22, 1968

The "G-F" piston loop lowered the pitch by one whole step instead of four steps as with the "G-D" piston loop. Instrument maker [Zigmant Kanstul](#) has been credited for developing and manufacturing the first line of these "G-F" instruments for his corps, the *Velvet Knights* of Anaheim, California. The instruments produced by Olds for the *Velvet Knights* gained popularity and acceptance among other corps quite quickly. Production of these bugles began in February 1968.

Beginning in 1968 the "G-F" bugle with a half-step rotor became the standard for drum corps. Now that the piston valve was a full step drop (as with the first valve of a standard trumpet) and the rotor most commonly used dropped the instrument's pitch a half-step (as does the second valve of a standard trumpet), the fingerings required for these instruments became identical to valved band instruments (except for the absence of a third valve).

During the transitional phase between "G-D" and "G-F" bugles, bugle manufacturers were producing both models simultaneously and having difficulty filling orders for the new "G-F" instruments. Advertisements by Getzen at the time offer advice and request purchasers to contemplate their decisions carefully prior to ordering--undoubtedly in the hopes of dissuading potential buyers from purchasing equipment from their competitor, F.E. Olds. Getzen's advertisement also included the patriotic statement echoed in bugle ads of decades prior: "To our knowledge, Getzen is the only 100% American Made Bugle."

Some confusion regarding the new "G-F" instruments swept through the ranks of the performers as corps began outfitting themselves with the new instruments. However, not everyone was confused. The venerable Pepe Notaro, French horn bugle soloist with the *New York Skyliners* approached his friend Tom Peashey of the *Syracuse Brigadiers* in hopes of borrowing his French horn bugle for the evening's competition. Peashey informed Notaro that he should take note that the instrument he was borrowing was a "G-F" bugle with fingerings different from the "G-D" instrument it was temporarily replacing. When asked by Peashey if he could handle the change, Notaro snapped back, "It's okay kid, I never use the [expletive deleted] valves anyway!"

Kits were available from manufacturers of the "G-D" bugles that enabled corps to replace (and thereby shorten) the coil of tubing attached to their instrument's primary piston. Once again, shrewd manufacturing provided corps a cost-effective alternative to upgrade their instrumentation without the necessity of purchasing entire new brass lines.

It was around this same time that new voices of bugles were being created corps such as the flugelhorn (championed by Ken Norman) that was first adopted by the *Racine Kilties* in 1969 and soon used by corps throughout the activity to expand their mid-voice sections.

The Two-piston and Three-piston Bugle

Drum Corps International (DCI) was formed in 1971 and assumed the rulemaking responsibilities for the majority of competing junior drum corps. In 1975 a proposal was being prepared for consideration by DCI that would permit the use of two-piston bugles by DCI corps. The pistons incorporated into these bugles would both be actuated with fingers on the right hand (as with the trumpet).

As manufacturers set about the task of retooling and implementing changes in the design of the modern marching competition bugle, designers began to ask among themselves if it wouldn't be more prudent to go ahead and legalize the three-piston bugle. Even staunch drum corps purists, who detested legalization that would alter their beloved "G-F" instruments, were perplexed at the concept of legalizing instruments that offered no chromatic advantage over the piston rotor instruments they would replace.

Zigmant Kanstul let it be known that the Benge Company was prepared to create a sample set of three-piston instruments for consideration. Dave Peterson submitted drawing of three-piston instruments along with the two-piston prototypes by the Dynasty Bugle Corporation. Hoping to bypass the intermediate two-piston "phase," both designers envisioned small corps gaining acceptance (and assistance) from local band directors if drum corps instruments had more in common with bell front marching band instruments.

Opponents of the three-piston instruments offered several counter arguments against their legalization. Retribution from angry musician's unions, legal action from BMI and ASCAP for music copyright infringements and financial inaccessibility for small corps were arguments used to shift the focus away from fully-chromatic bugles. Fearing an amended proposal would fail, the Brass Caucus forged ahead with its recommendation for the two-piston bugle.

Many corps were ready to refurbish their bugle choirs by the mid-1970s. **By 1976 approximately 8,000 bugles were being purchased annually in the United States, nearly twice as many sold in 1966.** Sensing the negative impact of corps stretching themselves financially, DCI structured their proposal to permit only the two-piston soprano for the 1977 season. Each year following, a new two-piston voice would be permitted for use by corps.

Proposal No. 1035 by Santa Clara Vanguard's director Gail Royer and the Madison Scout's director Bill Howard stated:

Each bugle shall be pitched in the key of G and may have two piston valves, or one piston and one rotary, or two rotary valves used freely to play in two additional keys. Any other variation of these types of instruments and all other types of instruments are illegal.

No two piston soprano bugles may be utilized before the 1977 season. No two piston bass baritones may be utilized before the 1978 season. No two piston mellophones, French horns, flugles, or Contra Bass bugles may be utilized before the 1979 season.

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NOTE: DCI would like to go on record as being permanently opposed to any three instruments.

CAUCUS VOTE: 63 FOR 24 AGAINST (2 / 3 majority - PASSED)

Perhaps it was a Freudian slip, but Drum Corps News mentioned DCI permanent opposition to any three [valved] bugles in its November 26, 1975 issue.

The late 1970s were particularly hard on drum corps. The incremental financial burden to upgrade brass lines combined with soaring insurance costs, production expenses, mismanagement and population decrease among teenagers proved to be too much for many corps to bear. **Between the 1978 and 1979 season, there was a startling 30% drop in the number of competing DCI junior corps.**

Despite the expense, a tremendous explosion of bugle designs occurred during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Instrument manufacturers retooled for the new two-piston instruments and stocked new types of voices (e.g., piccolo sopranos, alto bugles, tromboniums, flugabones, etc.). Further refinements also occurred to the existing mellophone and French horn bugles. D.E.G., King, and Getzen were the prominent instrument brands purchased by corps during this period.

The increased variety of instruments offered brass arrangers an opportunity to augment the art of drum corps brass arranging. The late 1970s and early 1980s are considered a "renaissance" for drum corps brass sections. The typical "World Class" corps of the 1980s would likely have ten to twenty more horns than their counterparts of the 1960s. Consequently, a little more attention was also being placed on brass arrangements and performance techniques. Pioneers like Jim Ott, Larry Kerchner, Wayne Downey, Jim Wren, and Jim Prime, Jr. were able to tailor brass arrangements that exploited the strengths of the new instrument types now available to them.

Despite the apparent acceptance of the two-piston instruments, all was not well. Interest in the three-piston bugle began again in 1979. Manufacturers were appalled by the thought of retooling their equipment to accommodate the manufacture of three-piston bugles before they had recouped the investments made to retool for the two-piston bugles. The flares, lead pipes, and most other components of the bugle would not differ after the introduction of the third piston, but retooling would have to occur to manufacture the redesigned valve clusters. Manufacturers of two piston bugles could expect to invest over \$150,000 in order to accommodate three-piston bugle.

Preferring to avoid the unstable climate of drum corps' governing body, King discontinued the manufacture of bugles during the 1980s. D.E.G. had already begun manufacturing its "Dynasty III" line of experimental three-piston bugles in 1977. By 1979, three-piston instruments were being shipped to Europe, where corps were permitted to compete with them.

(The article continues on into three piston bugles, but we shall stop here.)

Data Source:

<http://www.middlehornleader.com/Evolution%20of%20the%20Bugle%20--%20Section%204.htm>