

DRUM CORPS DIGEST

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ALASKA

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Like the 49th State itself, drum corps here in Alaska is very new, and the movement naturally lacks the lustre and competitive glamour that most of you accept as everyday. Our growth, due to environmental conditions beyond the imagination of most of you, has been slow, but we are under way and the only direction from here is up.

The competitive ideal, inter-corps competition, is completely absent here in Alaska at this time; however, with the growth of two new units in other parts of our state, we hope to have state-wide competition by this coming summer. At the present time, and for the past three years, the only competition that units in Alaska could really look forward to were those held at the National Conventions of The American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Unfortunately, trips of that magnitude cost four to five thousand dollars at their most conservative. Nevertheless, two Alaskan units have traveled outside the state. In 1963 "Corps of the North" of Fairbanks traveled to V.F.W. Nationals in Seattle. And, most recently, the "Northernairs" Color Guard of Fairbanks traveled to the American Legion Nationals in Portland.

The first real attempt at developing any semblance of a drum corps was made in 1957 when a Boy Scout Post in Anchorage started a unit which gained some popularity as a parade corps. Their life however was short,



Corps of the North perform for large crowd, Fairbanks, Alaska

and soon after acquiring a supply of piston bugles, the first step on the road of development, they faded away.

Shortly thereafter another unit was organized by the Fort Richardson (Anchorage) Cadet Civil Air Patrol Squadron. The corps was composed of boys and girls in the CAP Cadet program and was in existence for over two years before disbanding. During their brief life they captured National honors as one of the ten outstanding Cadet units in the Civil Air Patrol in the United States for 1958.

The first attempt at building a "dynamic modern-concept" drum corps came about in the fall of 1961 when an out-of-state-visitor, then stationed at nearby Ft. Wainwright, got together with a self-styled drum corps enthusiast here in Fairbanks. The visitor was The Digest's own Dave Shaw, the enthusiast myself. Dave's compelling de-

votion to drum corps and the ideals which drum corps people hold as basic soon infected others in the community of Fairbanks, and the "Corps of the North" Drum and Bugle Team was born. This unit achieved considerable recognition in the local area and throughout the State. The culmination of their three year rise came in their travel to Seattle in 1963 as official state representatives of the Department of Alaska, Veterans of Foreign Wars. The unit continued to grow until internal and management problems forced them to reorganize in the winter of 1965. At present they are planning a busy summer in 1966, and your writer will keep you informed on their progress.

The presently most active organization in Alaska is the "Northernairs." This unit is under the Direction of Francis J. McGrath (formerly with the Miami Vanguards), with myself as business manager. The unit is commanded by a veteran youth in the Alaskan drum corps movement, Cadet Captain Russell Wilkenson, 16, a junior at Lathrop High School in Fairbanks. The Northernairs are less than a year old, and last August traveled to the American Legion Nationals in Portland where their guard placed seventh with a score of 80.60. They will travel during the summer of '66 to Washington D.C. for the Legion Nationals.

The latest addition to our Alaskan drum corps family are the "Northern Cavaliers" Drum and Bugle Corps under the direction of Mr. Kieth Victor. This unit, located in our largest city of Anchorage, is just now in the formative stages of organization, and we hope to have more complete information on them for our next article. That is Alaska as it stands right now . . . the biggest and newest member of the drum corps community.

Northernairs Color Guard pose for photographer, Fairbanks, Alaska

