

The Drum Corps of American Legion Post #3 Great Falls, Montana

By Pacific Northwest Drum Corps.com

Loy J. Molumby American Legion Post #3 in Great Falls Montana organized its senior drum and bugle corps in 1933 and won the Montana State American Legion (AL) Championship in 1942.

In the 1949 Montana State AL Championships, Post #3 placed fourth. Their drum major, Delmont (Del) C. Thurber (who would go on to be the Director of the junior corps from 1952 thru 1976) took second place in the drum major category. Their uniforms were described as; "Royal blue and gold". Sounds like the same colors issued to the new junior corps in 1954. Both senior and junior corps wore the same colors.

In 1950, the senior corps won the "fun parade" at the American Legion state convention. The corps placed third in the field competition and Del Thurber placed third in the drum major category. Contest judges were provided by the All-American Drum and Bugle Corps Association of judges from Washington State.

1951 is the last documentation of the senior corps that we can find. Was that the end? Did the senior corps and the new junior corps co-exist at the same post? Or did the junior corps start where the senior corps ended? We do not know.

What we *do* know is that on October 11, 1952, AL Post #3 founded their junior drum & bugle corps.

The next year (1953) the junior corps won the Montana State Junior Drum & Bugle Corps title at the American Legion convention in Great Falls with a score of 76.29, beating some senior corps in the process (all senior and junior corps competed using the same senior division rules, so Post #3 scored higher than some of the senior corps even though they participated in different divisions). Their director was Del Thurber (the drum major of the 1949-50 Sr corps). The Jr corps consisted of 42 members.

In 1954 they received their first uniforms ahead of the American Legion convention; royal blue trousers with gold piping, gold satin shirts, and military-style garrison caps. (You can see these uniforms in their 1968 Oregon parade photo below). They won the Montana State junior corps championships again in 1954.



**1968 Great Falls AL Post #3 - Oregon Parade
Later known as The Golden Skyliners**

Post #3 signifies the third AL post established in the state of Montana

Post #3 brought in an Air Force sergeant by the name of James Hennessey to run the M&M program and write the field drill in 1956. He was a native of Philadelphia and had been a drummer with the Archer-Epler Senior Drum & Bugle Corps. With his added expertise, the corps won the Montana State Junior DC Championships every year from 1956 thru 1959.

Recap: They were the Montana state junior drum corps champions in 1953, '54, and 1956 thru 1959.

The post did not field a corps in 1960 or 1961.

From 1962 thru 1965 the corps performed at parades and other local events. Standard fare for all drum corps of the time.

There was an interesting post in the Great Falls Tribune in May of 1965 that reads:



Sounds like the usual drum corps politics reared its head. What drum corps history *hasn't* been affected by this? When the state's **best junior corps** says they do not want to belong to your organization, that's a HUGE statement. The Northwest Drum Corps Association (NWDCA) was formed later that year in November ('65). AL Post #3 were longtime active members of the NWDCA, and Del Thurber held several executive positions in that organization throughout the next decade.

From 1952 thru 1967, the corps was known as the "American Legion Post #3 Jr Drum & Bugle Corps". In **1968 they changed their name to the "Golden Skyliners Junior Drum & Bugle Corps of AL Post #3"**.

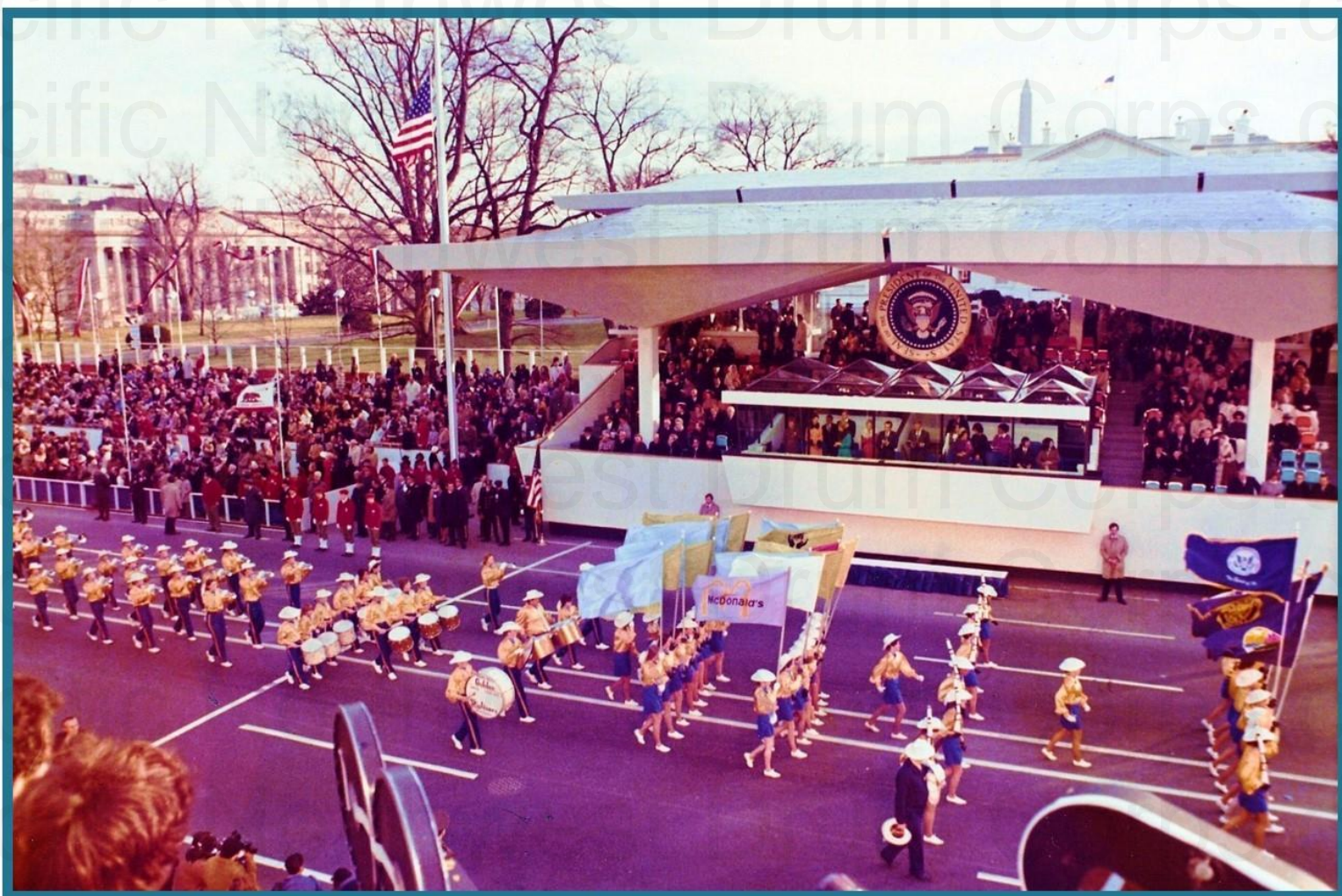
New for 1969, the Northwest Drum Corps Association (NWDCA) created a "C-Class" for drum corps. Historically, all corps in the Pacific NW competed in one class until "B-Class" was created in 1965 (thereby also creating "A-Class"). With 44 members, The Skyliners were competing in C-Class this year. Their rivals in that class were the Bellevue Guardsmen (WA), the Astoria Sunsetters (OR), and the Bremerton Titans (WA). For size comparison, the Portland Hawks (OR) had 80 members and were a top competitor in A-Class. Drum corps were smaller in those days.

In 1971 they moved up to B-Division. (For you younger folks out there, moving up a division was a big deal. The corps you competed against were tougher, bigger, and typically older. If you were in the top three in your division, chances are you earned prize money at each show. Moving up a division usually meant you were no longer in the top three and didn't earn prize money anymore. Things run better with money folks. If you have it, things run smoother. If you don't, it doesn't.)

The Skyliners were a small corps from a small town, and traveled long distances to compete. They had to; they were located in the middle of nowhere, corps-wise. The next nearest drum corps in the 1970s was 220-miles away. Just to compete in Seattle they had to drive 1,280 miles roundtrip.

They are an "Honorary PNW Drum Corps" on this website because they were always here competing. We saw them many times each season in Washington, Oregon, Canada, and sometimes even in California. We also traveled to Montana each year for their home show. They were an important part of our local drum corps scene and held the eastern front for the NWDCA.

In 1973 the Skyliners were selected to represent the State of Montana in President Richard Nixon's Inaugural Parade in Washington DC. What a fantastic opportunity to represent your state and do something for your country. The highlight of anyone's marching career, I'm sure. (See photo)



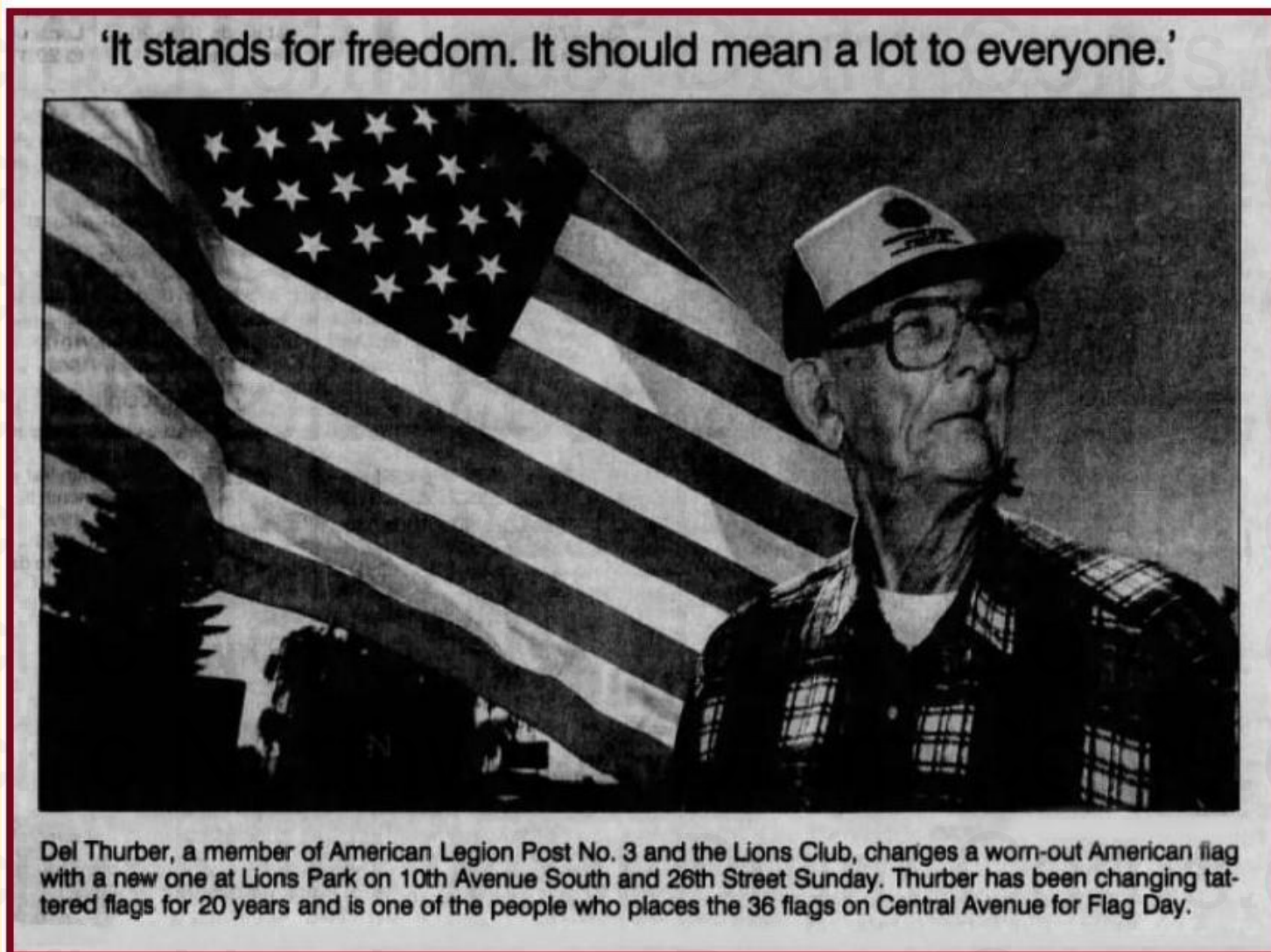
Golden Skyliners in President Nixon's 1973 Inaugural Parade

Throughout the 1970s the corps traveled thousands of miles and participated in many parades, contests, special events, bringing smiles to countless spectators.

The corps disbanded in 1982 after 30-years of service to the community.

Del Thurber and American Legion Post #3, kept that corps alive and vital for three decades. That is an amazing feat and a testament to their commitment to the education and betterment of kids. Del Thurber himself was the corps director from 1952 thru 1976.

Del passed away in January of 2001. He was a true American, a long-time American Legion member, community activist, and drum corps proponent. He had a huge impact in his community and the Pacific NW drum corps world.



1999 - Del Thurber, American

Long Live Drum Corps!

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See next page for Del Thurber's American Legion Post #3 history

American Legion Post #3, Great Falls Montana

- 1933 Post #3 starts senior D&BC
- 1942 Post #3 Sr Drum Corps – Montana State AL Champions
- 1951 Post #3 Sr Drum Corps - Last Documentation
- 1952 Junior D&BC formed

Del Thurber – Legion Post #3 Activity:

- 1949-1950 Post #3 Sr Drum Corps drum major
- 1950-1951 Post #3 Sargent at Arms
- 1952-1976 Director – Post #3 Junior D&BC
- 1955-1961 Post #3 Adjutant (7-years)
- 1962-1968 No office
- 1969 Post #3 Commander
- 1970 No office
- 1971-1973 Post #3 Adjutant (3-years)
- 1974 No office
- 1975-2000 Post #3 Adjutant (26-years)
- January 2001 Del Thurber passes away

SUMMATION:

- Post Senior Drum Corps drum major in 1949 & 1950 – Could have been earlier than 1949
- Post Sgt at Arms 1950-1951
- Director – Post #3 Junior D&BC 1952 – 1976
- Post #3 Adjutant 36-yrs
- Post Commander 1969