

The Tri-Cities Columbians of American Legion Post #34

by PNWDC.com, specializing in PNW drum corps of the 1960s and 1970s

Pasco is located in the arid southeast corner of Washington State and was home to one of the great drum corps of the Pacific Northwest. Between 1910 and the early 1950s, there were quite a few junior drum corps in eastern Washington. Scouts, Legion, VFW, Eagles and independent corps.

By 1956 there was only one competitive junior corps in eastern Washington, the Pasco Junior Legion D&BC, otherwise known as the Columbians. They were alone on the east side of the mountains until 1971, when the Spokane Percussion-Naut Patriots traded in their trumpets for G-bugles and obliterated all the other corps in the Pacific Northwest. But that's another story for another time.

The origins of the Columbians

In 1936 a Boy Scout drum and bugle corps was formed in Pasco, WA. It was co-sponsored by the Pasco American Legion Post #34 and the Boy Scouts of America. In October that year, the Legion Post took over sole sponsorship of the corps and renamed it the Pasco Legion Junior Drum & Bugle Corps. You can see the Boy Scout uniforms in their 1939 photo (above right).

Dr. Robert Reeves Glen (right in photo on right) sponsored and directed the corps at his American Legion Post where he was the commander. By 1940 not only did his drum corps have new uniforms, but they won the Washington State American Legion Junior Championship title. They won it again in 1941 and 1942. His corps disbanded between 1942 and 1947.

In 1948, AL Post #34 formed a new senior corps with some notable names involved. Harlan Ritter (left in photo on right) was the drum major (he was the DM in Dr. Glen's champion junior corps) with Neil Ault as his alternate. Neil Ault was one of the three directors that started the 1955 drum corps. Both Eldon Sargent and Larry Weltz (the other two directors that started the 1955 corps) were in the 1948 corps horn line. Dr. Glen himself taught percussion. No other information has been found on this 1948 senior corps. It is assumed that this corps was very short-lived.

In 1953 American Legion Post #34 tried again to start a senior corps using Dr. Glen's old equipment. This effort also failed to gain traction.

In November 1955 the Pasco Junior Legion D&BC was formed at Post #34. The directors were Larry Weltz, Neil Ault and Eldon Sargent. Dr. Glen was an advisor to the corps. The 1936 and 1955 corps are connected not only through AL Post #34, but through Dr. Glen. The 1955 corps wore the same uniforms as Dr. Glen's state champion corps of 1940 through 1942.

This 1955 corps won the Washington State American Legion junior title in 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961 and 1963, and the Washington State VFW Junior Championships in 1962 and 1964.

On February 29, 1960, the old American Legion Post #34 building where the corps stored their equipment, caught fire by a grease explosion in the kitchen. Almost all of the corps' equipment and uniforms were destroyed. All that was left was some memorabilia (left).

Without uniforms, the corps wore all white for 1960 and the first half of the 1961 season. In the second half of 1961, the corps sported brand-new uniforms and a new name, the Pasco Columbians. No more Junior Legion. The



In 1963 they changed their name again to the Tri-City Columbians to reflect their wider



uniforms came just in time for the Washington State American Legion Championships (they won Junior Division) and for their trip to the American Legion Nationals held in Denver, CO (right).

They went to Las Vegas, NV, for the AL Nationals (middle right) in 1962 (middle left), made a showing at the Seattle World's Fair and played for Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ, below left) for us older folks) at the Ice Harbor Dam dedication, located 14 miles east of the Tri-Cities.

community support of the Tri-City area (Pasco, Richland, Kennewick). They won the Washington State American Legion Junior Championships for the fifth time in 1963 and competed in the VFW Nationals held in Seattle, WA, that year.

From 1962 through 1968 they were one of the big three corps in the Pacific Northwest along with the Seattle Thunderbirds and the Seattle Shamrocks. All three battled it out for first place

at each competition.

[Financial] difficulties arose and they did not field a corps for the 1969 or 1970 seasons, but re-emerged in 1971 in the B Division and began their climb back to the top once more.

In August 1973, they took a trip back east and marched in the U.S. Open prelims in Marion, OH, and DCI prelims in Whitewater, WI. They did good for a PNW corps, scoring in the mid-50s in both shows. In the PNW, they averaged third place in the nine local shows that we have on record for 1973.



The Columbians had the honor of presiding over the hottest, most grueling parade in the PNW, the Tri-Cities Water Follies Parade. What a truly miserable parade it was. Please see the September 2021 edition of this publication to read about this event, or go to www.PacificNorthwestDrumCorps.com under "Highlighted Events" for the unabridged version.

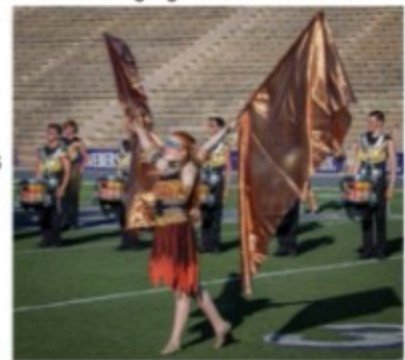
Sadly, 1975 was the last season for the Columbians. (Below left, 2018; below right, 2019, Donny Helvey)

For those of us on the west side of the stat, we always thought the Columbians were a great corps and a tough competitor. We didn't like going to eastern Washington for their home show because it was always 90+ degrees



in July. Us "coasters" aren't used to that much sun. We don't tan in Seattle, we rust! The current Columbians drum corps was formed in 2012 and is an entirely separate entity from the 1955 to 1975 corps. The Tri-Cities are lucky to have another fine drum corps in their midst.

Roll-on Columbians, roll-on! PacificNorthwestDrumCorps.com. ■■■



They Are Bugle Corps Winners

