

The rise and fall of senior drum corps in the Pacific Northwest

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American Legion & VFW Drum Corps

The Pacific Northwest had many senior corps -- American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Elks, Moose, Eagles, Shrine and independent corps. Since Legion/VFW comprise an average of 92% of all the PNW senior drum corps activity, our focus will be on them.

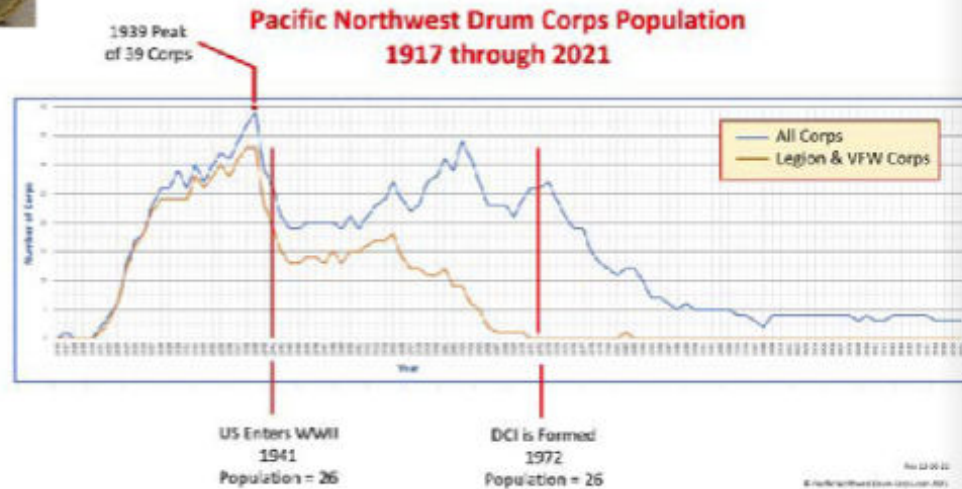
All data presented here was extracted from PacificNorthwestDrumCorps.com and shows what we believe to be an accurate representation of our local drum corps population back in the day. Reference sources for the original material was derived from material found in the December 1963 and April 1964 issues of *Drum Corps News*, the *Kipsap Sun* in December 1967 and the PNW Web site.

Washington had a greater number of American Legion and VFW corps than Oregon. That was a function of population density. The same was true with the

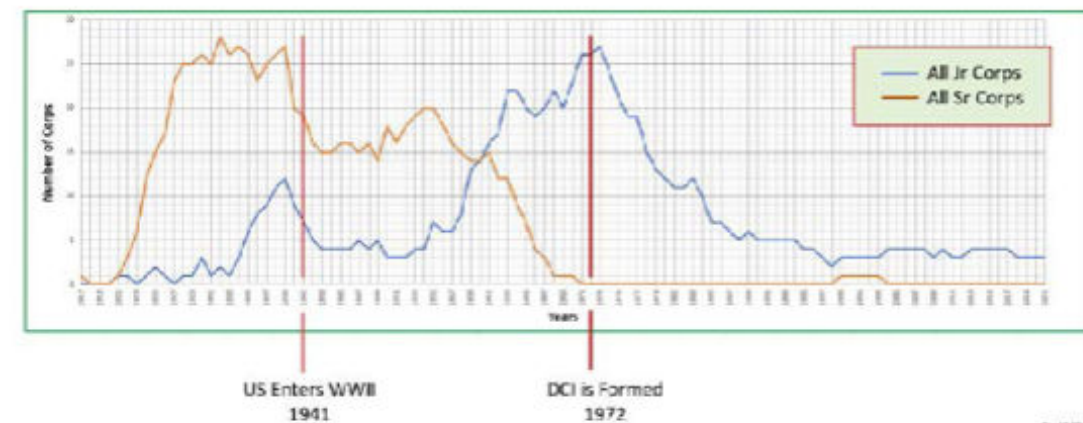


1960s and 1970s corps scene. Per the 1960 U.S. Census, the Washington state population was 2,853,214. Oregon had 1,768,687 people, 38% less than Washington. Less people equals less corps.

Obviously, we cannot account for every corps that existed due to lack of data, but we have documented around 150



Pacific Northwest - Junior vs. Senior Corps Populations 1917 through 2021



unique corps; between 1917 and 1995.

World War I

Referring to the "PNW DC Population" chart, you can see that the PNW Legion/VFW corps population exploded with the creation of the American Legion in 1919

after World War I and peaked in 1939.

World War II

Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 starting WWII. A year later, on September 16, 1940, the United States instituted the draft for all able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 45.

The war resulted in many Legion and VFW veterans being drafted or voluntarily re-enlisting into the military. The chart reflects the war by the rapid drop of senior corps between 1939 and 1943. Other minor contributing factors could also be at play, like finances or equipment issues, but they would not account for a reduction of 20 senior corps in four years. That's a 63% drop in senior corps. Wow.

The Korean Conflict

The Korean War ran from 1950 through 1953, creating the secondary peak of returning troops on our graph between 1953 and 1955. From there things went downhill with the senior corps population dipping below the junior population in 1960. [See "Jr. vs Sr .chart" on the previous page]

By 1963, discussions had taken place between senior corps and the Washington State Drum Corps Association to find a way to staunch the flow of senior membership. The feeling at the time was to have the seniors hold on for a few more years until the juniors aged-out and became available. Others felt it was too late already.

In 1964 discussions were still taking place about dropping the senior age limit from 21 to 19-years old. The seniors weren't asking permission to draw from active junior corps, but to approach those coming home from the military who were no longer interested in marching with the juniors. This amounted to stealing the most experienced (oldest) members from the juniors and they weren't having it. [From our point of view, we suspect the seniors just wanted the bodies of returning soldiers to fill their ranks. Their skill level was a secondary concern at best].

There was a new local drum corps association created in the fall of 1965. That was the Northwest Drum Corps Association (NWDCA). As usual, when an existing drum corps association doesn't heed those member corps interested in change, a new association will form. There was more than the senior membership issue involved in the creation of the NWDCA, but it took the NWDCA to finally take some action.

In December 1967, the NWDCA agreed to lower the senior age limit. The agreement was to allow 17-year-olds to join the seniors during the 1968 season, 18-year-olds to join the seniors in the 1969 season and 19-year-olds to join the seniors from 1970 and so on.

The problem with this solution? There was only one senior corps alive in 1968. The Bremerton, WA, Grenadiers, and they were the ones presenting this proposal to the NWDCA. Too little too late in our opinion.

The NWDCA probably saw this as a "no lose" proposition with only one active senior corps left. This decision would've also been a "no-brainer" in our book.

Under the new membership rules, the Grenadiers won the last Washington State American Legion Senior Championship (unopposed) in July 1970 and marched their last field competition at the American Legion National Championships (prelims) a month later in Portland, OR.

That bears repeating -- The 1970 American Legion Nationals in Portland was the LAST senior drum corps competition held in the Pacific Northwest. Ever!

The Grenadiers soldiered on, marching parades off and on until their last sighting at the New Westminster, British Columbia, parade in 1982.

The decline of Legion and VFW membership over the past 50-plus-years has caused many posts to merge or close. This is a sad state for such proud institutions. The posts we visited have rented their floor space to dojos, wedding receptions or other community events to raise funds because they don't have enough dues-paying members anymore to cover their costs. It is what it is.

We fear there will never be another American Legion or VFW senior drum corps in the Pacific Northwest. Their glorious moment in time has passed forever.

Long live drum corps!, PacificNorthwestDrumCorps.com. ■■■ © Pacific Northwest Drum Corps.com 2023





One of the most spectacular of the drum and bagge corps in yesterday's parade and in the "American Legion Auxiliary Auxiliary" starting at Central station was that of the Spokane "snappy" drum and bagge corps. Their uniforms, of the same design as those worn by the "snappy" corps, were introduced by local drum and bagge corps. A picture of a drum, with the words "AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY SPOKANE WASH" on it, is shown in the foreground. The drum is a "snappy" drum, and the bagge is a "snappy" bagge.

American Legion auxiliary drum and bagge corps members received their new uniforms this week. The first set of uniforms for the Spokane group appeared on May 22, the 100th-anniversary day of the society, when the group appeared in the city. American Legion members are, left to right, Bob Miller, Libby Clark, Elmer Clark, Billie Pugh, Paul Miller, Jack Smith, and John Smith. From other groups: Stephen, Steve, Stephen, Billie Clark, Tom Pugh, Elmer Clark, Carole Moore, Eddie Kellard, and Maude Miller.

THE AMERICAN LEGION DRUM CORPS



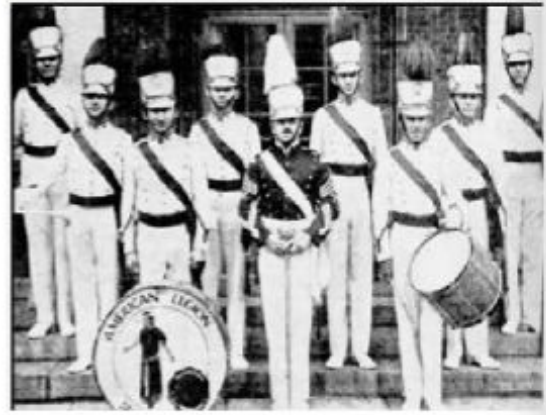
Coos Bay is indeed each year to the local American Legion Post for many things which we have not the space to discuss here—Sawmills, for example, one of local veterans, and the various things the post does in the interest of citizenship—but particularly to the Drum Corps.

The Legion Drum Corps was organized by Coos Bay Post No. 17 in the fall of 1926. Since that time it has participated in three state Legion drum corps contests, in each case "making high." It has made many appearances in Coos, Curry, and Douglas Counties. It accompanied the Coos County Chamber of Commerce caravan to Eureka, California, in April, 1928.

A total of \$3000 is invested in its equipment and uniforms. It is financed by various activities of the Legion, all of which receive a generous support from the community—and in addition, by donations from various individuals and clubs.

LEGION DRUM CORPS—Top row, left to right: Walter Collier, Treasurer; Walter Aghard, Earl Naps, Charles Higgins, Lester Cox, Stanley Briggs, Sam Wenzel, Robert Dillard, Ben Dorn. Middle row, left to right: Everett Wilson, Fessie Wilson, Andy Adams, Carl Bowman, Jack Victoria, Earl Jenkins, Ed Henderson. Lower row, left to right: Max Davis, Charlie Halsey, Jack Depledge, Herb Thom, Larry Thomas, Tom Evans, Leo Tamm, Ben Glen, George Potts.

Legion Drum and Bagge Corps Sports New Uniforms



(Top to bottom) 1936 Spokane, WA, AL auxiliary; 1950 Klamath Falls, WA, AL; 1950 Auburn, WA, AL Post #78; 1950 Auburn, WA, AL Post #78; 1954 Portland, OR, AL Post #1, Rose Parade, Pasadena, CA; 1950 Walla Walla, WA, Eagles Aerie #26; 1977 Bremerton, WA, Grenadiers, Washington State VFW champions, 1959-1962, state American Legions champions, 1977 (Daily News); 1950 Wenatchee, WA, Washington state champions, 1927-1928, 1956, 1961; 1971 Bremerton, WA, Grenadiers (Port Angeles, News).



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(Top to bottom) 1928 Tacoma, WA, Elks state champions, 1927 and 1928; 1934 Spokane, WA, AL Post #9, Washington state champions, 1935 and 1936; 1929 Coos Bay, WA, AL Post #17; 1934 Spokane, WA, AL (Spokane Chronicle); 1930 Auburn, WA, AL Post #78, AL Champions 1941, 1942, 1947, 1949, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1958; 1931 Wenatchee, WA, AL Post #10, AL champions, 1927, 1928, 1956, 1961; 1932 AL Capital Post #9.



American Legion Capital Post #9, Salem Oregon Charles Whittemore, Drum Major Award Winner 112 American Legion Nationals in Portland Oregon



Drum Major of Bremerton breaks his leg while working in the Bremerton Naval Shipyard, but it didn't stop him from "marching" in the Derby Cross parade pushed by Dave Tiedemann.

