

The Corps of the North – Fairbanks Alaska

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Specializing in PNW Drum Corps of the 1960s and 70s

The Corps of the North was the one and only drum and bugle corps from the state of Alaska in the 1960s. It was formed in June of 1962 by Dave Shaw who marched with the Holy Name (Garfield) Cadets of New Jersey playing baritone from 1950 thru 1958. In 1962 he was a member of the US Army stationed in Fairbanks, and that is where he formed the corps. Dave was also the “Drill Master” for the corps in 1962 and 1963.

The corps Director (1962 – 1964) was Ron Rizzi, a college senior majoring in education at the University of Alaska.

The corps started life with all-boy bugle and percussion sections (no girls allowed), and an all-girl color guard. Interestingly, the color guard carried a unique set of flags. They were; the US flag, United Nations flag, Canadian flag, Alaskan flag, VFW flag, Corps of the North flag, Jewish flag, Christian flag, Catholic flag, and the “Symbol” flag. The corps had membership age limits of between 13 and 18 years old.

They did all of the standard drum corps fund raising functions; marched in parades, played at events, sold candy bars and raffle tickets. It must’ve been hard being the only corps in the state as there were no local drum corps competitions.

They toured the Seattle area in August 1963 and marched “exhibition” at the Renton Blue Angels’ show; “The Angels Sing” on the 25th. The Corps bivouacked with the Angels in Renton. Great hosts those Angels.

Two days later, the North was the leading musical unit at the August 27th VFW Nationals parade in Seattle and placed 17th in the VFW Nationals preliminary competition, but did not make the finals. The corps was only 14-months old at this point, so nice job!

In 1964 they were scheduled to start the season at the Seattle Thunderbirds Mid-Winter Competition on April 18th, until the “Big One” hit.

In 1964 the corps had to withdraw from all drum corps competitions in the “lower 48” including the VFW Nationals in Cleveland Ohio due to the disastrous (9.2 on the Richter scale) earthquake that struck Alaska on March 27th. Instead, they stayed home and raised money for the Alaskan disaster victims. [Well done people!] Those of us in the Seattle area remember the quake well. It was the biggest quake recorded in North American history to this day and is the second largest recorded quake in the world behind the 1960 Chilian earthquake of 9.5 (USGS.gov).

In 1965 they continued to make local appearances and raised money to fly to VFW Nationals in Chicago in August of that year. To our knowledge, they never made it to Nationals or traveled out of state again. When they did travel, they flew commercial. Muy expensive that.

The corps last known sighting was in a May 1966 Fairbanks parade.

Short lived; the only drum corps in the state, and an honorary Pacific Northwest drum corps. What more can you ask for?

Our hats off to Dave Shaw. Never be afraid to start a drum corps people; wherever you are!

NOTE – Dave Shaw was a marching member of the Garfield Cadets in the 1950s, formed the Corps of the North in 1962, and went on to become a preeminent drum corps publicist, writer, and instructor working for the Troopers (1960s), Garfield Cadets (1970s), and DCI as their first official spokesman in 1971. He dedicated his life to drum corps and we're all richer for it.

Long Live Drum Corps!

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