

Drum corps of the Olympic Peninsula

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Pacific Northwest Drum Corps.com -- specializing in PNW drum corps of the 1960s and 1970s

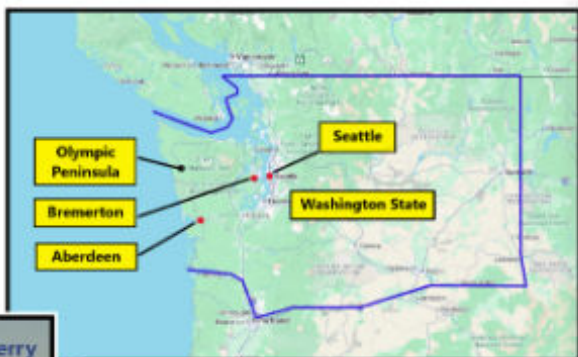
1960 through 1980d drum corps

Washington State has a large peninsula along its Pacific coast. It contains the 1,442 square mile Olympic National Park that encompasses 40% of the peninsula. Along with the park are logging and timber mills, bighorn sheep, salmon, bears, Sasquatch and a myriad of other things.



A great deal of the peninsula's interior is uninhabited. One of the major employers on the peninsula is the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, established in 1891. Bremerton is the largest city on the peninsula and is the nexus of drum corps activity in that region.

Since the 1960s, the peninsula has been home to three drum corps. They are the



Bremerton Grenadiers senior corps, the Bremerton Titans and the Port Orchard Guardsmen, nee Dreadnaughts.

These corps were self-promoted at various times as based in Bremerton or Port Orchard, or both. They are a city pair separated by a narrow body of water, eight

miles apart by car or two miles by ferry. The peninsula covers 3,600 square miles and all three of these drum corps originated within a five-mile radius. Such a miniscule drop of drum corps in a huge expanse of land.

Being located on the peninsula is a difficult proposition for a drum corps. Getting from Bremerton to Seattle is either a 45-minute / 19-mile ferry ride across Puget Sound or, as drum corps do, a long drive south to Tacoma then back up on the east side of Puget Sound to Seattle in a 67-mile trip. Living on the peninsula made travel more difficult for a drum corps as the vast majority of the activity took place on the mainland.

The Grenadiers were formed in 1957 as the VFW 4th District Kitsap County D&BC. They were Washington State VFW Senior Champs from 1959 through 1962 and won the last Washington state American Legion senior title in 1970.

There have been no more senior drum corps field competitions, save solo appearances by the Grenadiers, in the Pacific Northwest since 1970. After 1970, they maintained a steady presence as a parade corps and marching

occasional shows with their last known appearance in the New Westminster BC (Canada) parade in 1982.

The next corps to be formed on the peninsula was the Bremerton Titans in 1968. Their founder / director was David Rasmussen who played soprano with the Grenadiers in the early 1960s. They drew from the five school districts that surround Bremerton and had an average of around 100 members (back in the 1960s and 1970s drum corps were limited to 120 members each).

They were local C and B Division champions in 1969 and 1970, respectively. Their last known documented appearance was in 1978 at the DCI Class A Prelims in Denver, CO. The Titans disbanded



1961 Grenadiers, Bremerton WA
David Rasmussen, Titans Founder, right end



1970 Grenadiers Sr. D&BC, Bremerton WA

early in 1979. The last corps on the peninsula was the Dreadnaughts, formed in 1974. One of their co-founders was Armin Jahr, a booster club trustee with the Titans in 1973. The Dreadnaughts entered their



1973 Grenadiers Sr. D&BC

first competition in 1975 wearing authentic early U.S. Navy uniforms. In 1976 they changed their name to the Guardsmen and then wore red, white and blue uniforms to commemorate the Bi-Centennial. They marched competitively in 1976 and 1977.



**ca 1969 Titans
Bremerton, WA**

In 1978 they did not compete, but stayed close to home and performed at local events. They disbanded at the end of that year.

As usual with the PNW drum corps scene, a bugler from the Grenadiers formed the Titans that had a booster club trustee who went on to form the Dreadnaughts. Drum corps begat drum



**1975 Dreadnaughts
Port Orchard, WA**



corps. This happened all the time here. **Pre-1960 American Legion and VFW drum corps**

Our research has found 10 American Legion (AL) and VFW drum corps on the peninsula between 1927 and 1960. Since the Legion started in 1919 and the VFW in 1899, there were undoubtedly more undocumented corps than that.

Wherever the doughboys came home after the war, they formed a VFW or Legion Post and some of those posts formed drum corps. Those drum corps battled it out for supremacy and bragging rights amongst their

peers.

There's only one drum corps at the top of the heap on a local, state or national level. Only one! It's been that way since the beginning of time and will be that way after we're all gone. Drum corps reigns supreme.

Three peninsula towns held Washington State Legion and VFW Conventions. Aberdeen (pop 18,489), Port Angeles (pop 16,367) and Hoquiam (pop 10,466). Each town is much smaller than Bremerton (pop 35,301) which is the titan



of cities on the peninsula (local pun intended). For comparison, Seattle had a population of 530,831. (All population data per the 1970 census).

Small towns fought for and landed those money-generating, chest-beating, drum corps-playing conventions. Some of those conventions had an outrageous amount of hijinks. Gotta love those Legionnaires.

Out of the three convention cities on the peninsula, Aberdeen and Hoquiam, a city pair less than seven miles apart, hosted 12 of 15 state conventions on the peninsula between 1921 and 1964.

Those of you of a younger age will recognize Aberdeen as the hometown of rock legend Kurt Cobain of Nirvana. I wish I could tell you that Cobain marched drum corps, but sadly I cannot. He just wasn't that cool. He did, however, grow up less than a mile from Aberdeen AL Post #5 where a drum corps existed in some form or another from 1924 through 1959.



Aberdeen and Hoquiam each had AL and VFW drum corps at various times. These cities are so small and close in proximity that the veteran posts from both cities sponsored the same drum corps at different points in time. Same thing with the Bremerton Grenadiers that started life as a VFW corps, then migrated to American Legion sponsorship as VFW corps and their shows disappeared. As it turned out, the Grenadiers were the last VFW-sponsored senior corps and the last American Legion-sponsored senior corps in Washington State.

Other peninsula drum corps were the Port Angeles Boy Scouts (1934-1940), the Bremerton Odd Fellows junior corps (1941) and the Bremerton Moose Girls junior corps (1940-1947). People usually talk about AL and VFW corps, but there were many other organizations sponsoring drum corps back in the day.



Being a drum corps on the peninsula was tough. A small population, large distances to travel and the ever-present budget shortfalls from which we all suffered. Were these corps exceptional? Not on the national stage, but that's not the measure of a corps is it? Drum corps are not



measured by stature or by talent, but by heart. And baby, these corps had heart and the Grenadiers in particular had a lot of heart.

Remember, we need to embrace all drum corps, big and small. None is more important than the another. What is important is our love and support for the activity.

In 2025 Washington State is down to two national-level drum corps. The first is 17-miles directly northeast of Bremerton in Seattle, the second is another 220-miles southeast of Seattle in the Tri-Cities. Roll on drum corps, roll on! Much thanks to Beth Anderson for donating the rare 50-year-old Dreadnaught photos and to Kurt Jull who facilitated our meeting. This article could not have happened without both of their help.

Long live drum corps! -- ©Pacific Northwest Drum Corps.com 2025. ■