

# SPLIT-OPS: USING YOUR ARMY BAND TO ACHIEVE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

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U.S. Army Bands Program

It's July 4, 2010, at Camp Victory, Iraq, and the 1st Armored Division Band is faced with four very important taskings for musical support on the same day. On this, the United States' Independence Day, support was requested for a televised naturalization ceremony at the Al-Faw Palace with Vice President Joe Biden as the guest of honor; an Independence Day celebration with the U.S. ambassador to Iraq at the U.S. embassy; a memorial bugle ceremony at an outlying joint security station; and a troop morale concert at another outlying JSS. Before the days of musical performance teams, the 1AD Band would have had to choose just one of these very important events to support.

Fortunately, modularity has redefined what is possible for Army bands, both while deployed and when at their home stations. Although bands are still capable of performing en masse, their strength now rests in their ability to provide support to multiple events concurrently.

For this particular Fourth of July, the 1AD band was able to support each of the high-level VIP events and the memorial bugle ceremony while also entertaining Soldiers stationed at the remote JSS. They desperately needed the music of a modern Army band to raise their spirits and bring a sense of home during another holiday spent away from their families.

As the Army struggles to keep pace with a high operational tempo during this era of persistent conflict, and as the Army Force Generation cycle continues to spin our brigades and other formations in and out of combat zones, Army bands have

changed the way they provide musical support to our Soldiers and to the nation.

Historically, Army bands performed primarily as large musical ensembles under the direction of a commissioned officer or warrant officer for events such as military ceremonies, parades and public concerts. These events traditionally employed all of the assigned Army musicians collectively for each musical mission. As the Army became increasingly modular, requests for musical support — both at home and in the combat zone — quickly began to exceed the capacity of our bands.

In 2001, the Army Bands Program proposed a force design update that restructured all active-duty, Reserve and National Guard Army bands into modular organizations designed to better meet the demand for concurrent musical support. The new structure focused on modularity and began with multiple “building blocks” called music performance teams. MPTs are small musical ensembles that can play popular, traditional or patriotic music, and are designed to perform independently of each other.

As leaders figure out how best to employ MPTs during this period of persistent conflict, division and corps leaders are utilizing the modular “split-ops” capability

of their bands to accomplish both home-station and deployed missions concurrently. The leadership of the 101st Airborne Division, 25th Infantry Division, 4th Infantry Division and 1st Cavalry Division have all made the decision to leave a few MPTs back during the deployment of their division headquarters. These teams provide home-station support for brigade combat teams in reset, family members and the local community, while other MPTs are forward-deployed to support Soldiers, ceremonies,



A music performance team from the 1st Armored Division Band plays during a ceremony at Camp Prosperity, Iraq, in June 2010.

Photo courtesy U.S. Army Bands Program



Photo by Jack Gordon

Sgt. Caroline Stitt plays the piccolo as the 78th Army Band performs patriotic music during the activation ceremony of the 99th Regional Support Command at Fort Dix, N.J., in September 2008.

multinational events and nation-building efforts with our allies.

A split-ops approach for the utilization of Army bands has many advantages over the traditional model of deploying an entire division band into a combat zone. This became evident several years ago when the 101st Airborne Division took its entire band to Iraq. With all of their musical assets in-theater, there was no musical support left back home to cover troop departures and arrivals, memorials, and other ceremonies or events for the brigades and family members left behind. The long planning cycle, statutory limitations and resourcing challenges required to activate National Guard and Reserve musicians in support of home-station events quickly proved untenable.

Since then, several deploying division headquarters have made the decision to leave up to 50 percent of their musicians (in MPT sets) in the rear for home-station support. These rear detachment MPTs have been able to support troop arrivals and departures, meet the needs of BCTs in reset or training, provide a level of support for families back home, and give the deployed MPTs the opportunity for train-up prior to deployment with adequate recovery before resuming their musical mission upon redeployment.

Deployment using MPTs has reduced deployment fatigue, has allowed branch managers to extend tour lengths and has minimized the turnover of key personnel. In the 4th Infantry Division, creative leaders have taken this a step further by rotating forward-deployed and rear detachment MPTs every 3 to 6 months

throughout the 12-month deployment cycle. This is providing vital deployment experience for more musicians while giving the supported Soldiers downrange a better variety of entertainment groups during their deployment.

Army bands have proven to be powerful assets for the U.S. Army and our nation, serving as the “boots on the ground” of strategic communications. By organizing in a flexible modular structure, leveraging technology and employing talented Soldier-musicians with gifted leaders, Army bands have built ready, relevant and flexible music performance teams that are deployable, easy to transport and capable of effectively winning the hearts and minds of audiences both at home and abroad.

These Soldiers, when used to accomplish strategic goals, can raise the morale of our troops, strengthen our national pride, and promote American interests around the world.

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