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HISTORY
of
The Official Army Air Corps Song
THE ARMY AIR CORPS
composed by
ROBERT CRAWFORD
compiled by
Mildred A. Yount

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Informal History of the "Army Air Corps" Song
By: Mildred A. Yount (Mrs. Barton K. Yount)

1938 The Air Corps had no official song and earlier attempts in 1933, by competition, to produce a verse that could be set to music had failed to inspire a song. Arrangements were made by Chief of the Air Corps, Major General Oscar Westover, and his Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Henry H. Arnold, with Bernarr Macfadden, owner of "Liberty Magazine", for a competition. Mr. Macfadden offered a prize of \$1000 for the song the Air Corps would accept. The rules of the competition stated that the song would be the property of the composer and that it would be published by the composer.

"Liberty Magazine" published the rules of the composition weekly and soon manuscripts were pouring into the Office of the Chief of Air Corps.

August '38 A chairman and song committee was appointed. Mrs. Leslie MacDill, chairman, Mrs. Clarence L. Tinker, and Mrs. Max Schneider were asked to assist her. Colonel MacDill was killed before the Song Committee had a chance to function.

September Major General Oscar Westover was killed, and Brigadier General Henry H. Arnold was appointed to succeed him.

Informal History of the Air Corps Song - continued

January '39 Mrs. Barton K. Yount was asked to head a Committee to choose four or five songs from the accumulated manuscripts. There were about three hundred at that time, and more were arriving daily.

The committee asked to assist her changed frequently due to the transfer of husbands, but Mrs. Clarence L. Tinker, Mrs. Max F. Schneider, Mrs. Leslie MacDill, and Mrs. Carl A. Spaatz worked faithfully.

We would each take home, after a meeting, about 15 songs; study them, and at our next meeting, play the ones that we thought had possibilities. First, before we adjourned, every song was played so that no song could be discarded without everyone's approval.

The entries were so poor that we sent an appeal to the Society of Authors and Composers calling their attention to the competition, and asking them to enter. The top flight composers, we were told, stated that they would compose a song for the Air Corps, but would not enter a competition.

May '39 At this point, we were so discouraged over the entries that we decided to close the competition

Informal History of the Air Corp Song - continued

on June 30th. We had received over seven hundred manuscripts and only a few were worth even taking to musical experts that we had decided to consult.

Colonel Edmond L. Gruber, composer of the famous Field Artillery song "The Caissons Go Rolling Along" at this point said, "You can't force Army songs. When you find a song you will like, it will come from a young flyer, one who has the feel of flying in his bones and knows the thrill and the glamour of the Air Corps."

June '39 We then had one excellent hymn, two marches that were passable; none had the thrill we were looking for and we didn't feel that they would please the men in the Air Corps. We talked of closing the competition and saying we had NOT found our song.

Two days before the competition closed officially, Colonel Harrison H. C. Richards called me and said, "There is a composer and his wife in my office, and I wish you would see them. He has written a song and he wants to tell you about it. Please see them and take care of this for me." I reminded him that the Committee did not listen to songs sung by the composer in person--they had

Informal History of the Air Corps Song - Continued

to be submitted through the usual channels to enter the competition. Colonel Richards said he understood, but they had flown from New York and deserved some consideration for their interest and effort.

I could tell there was nothing for it, that Colonel Richards wanted me to see the man and his wife and soften the refusal to appear before the whole committee.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Crawford arrived in short order. I didn't have long to feel sorry for the plight of the chairman of the song committee.

I explained to them that I was only one of many and that I did not listen to songs sung by composers, that nothing could be done without the manuscript. Mr. Crawford said he didn't have the manuscript, but that he had a recording. Mr. Crawford then asked how much time he had to submit the manuscript. I said he would have to have it in by the following night. He then explained that a friend of his had told him about the competition just a few days ago and that, as he flew from New York to his home in Cos Cob, Connecticut, the song took shape and he finished the words the next day, made the recording,

Informal History of the Air Corps Song - Continued

and flew to Washington with Mrs. Crawford.

Mrs. Crawford than said "Bob, why don't you sing it for Mrs. Yount and see if she thinks it is worth while for you to send in the manuscript." Before I could protest again, he had seated himself at the piano and was singing.

Mr. Crawford has a fine baritone voice, and it was such a contrast to what I had expected after my months of dreary manuscripts and records that I thought the tingle I found creeping up my spine was due to his voice and not the song he was singing. When he had finished, I asked him what the title of his song was, and he said, "What do you think of the Air Corps now?". I advised him to change that before submitting the manuscript, and told him that the committee was meeting to go over the final lot two days later, and that if he could give me the words before leaving Washington, we could wait a day for the manuscript. (As a matter of record Crawford wrote out before leaving the apartment the melody and words so the rules of the competition were complied with.)

I felt so sorry for the Crawford's high hopes that had speeded them to Washington that I suggested that he go to the National Symphony Orchestra and

Informal History of the Air Corps Song - Continued

see if they had filled the soloist position for a concert in August. (He did go, and was engaged for one of the summer "Water-Gate" concerts.)

After the Crawfords left, I played the record and listened, I suddenly realized that we had something fresh and new as far as composition was concerned. The title and some of the words needed changing.

Mr. Crawford had said that the song seemed to come to him out of the sky into the engine. I began to believe it as I found myself humming it all the next day.

The Committee met to look over the last lot of songs that had poured into the Chief's office and I buried Crawford's manuscript and record in the middle of the pile.

The top of the pile held nothing of much interest. I sat and waited for their reaction to Mr. Crawford's song. Their reaction was electric. They sat up and just stared at each other.

We now had five songs, and everyone agreed that none of them was perfect--words had to be changed and something had to be done to each, but at least there was good music in them.

Informal History of the Air Corps Song - Continued

We had recordings made by the same voice and the records were numbered. Voting slips were mimeographed with five questions. Cross slots were put in for check marks. Each person was asked to answer the following:

1. Has the song "Umph"?
2. Does it make you feel like marching?
3. Would you like to sing it?
4. Do you like the words?
5. Check the song you would choose for an Air Corps Song.

The records and voting slips were sent to the Bolling Field enlisted men's club. Officers were asked to gather and hear the songs and vote. I gave parties and asked many to come and listen and vote. Many votes were cast and 86% of the votes were for Robert Crawford's song. Even those who voted against it admitted it was good, but they said they didn't like the words. The words, before we fought the war, were realistic. Even after the song was chosen, much pressure was brought to bear to have the words changed.

July '39 Before the five songs were recorded, we felt that we should get the very best musical advice we could. They were taken to Walter Nash, organist in Washington, D. C. Mr. Nash had been a music reader for Shirmers for eight years. He was an excellent judge of the originality of a composition.

Informal history of the Air Corps Song - Continued

After Mr. Nash had approved of the originality of the compositions, they were submitted to Hans Kindler, Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra.

He wrote the following letter:

"Dear Mrs. Yount,

Wings on High is "professional" but rather too much tune poor. "That's the Army Air Corps" is the best, still not worth \$1000. Still it has something. Why not give it \$400 and leave the competition open--probably an impractical suggestion. Don't change the progression in bars 15 & 23.

Bien a vous

Hans Kindler."

Rudolph Ganz was appearing as guest conductor with the National Symphony Orchestra and I asked him to look at the manuscripts and give us his advice.

He called me the next day and asked me to come and pick the music up at his Hotel. I announced myself from the lobby and as I left the elevator and started toward the Ganz suite at the Raleigh Hotel, Ganz himself actually burst from the door and came walking --or rather bounding-- down the hall, whistling Mr. Crawford's song and exclaiming in between measures --"It's a great song-- It has music-- It has fire, spirit--It will be famous!"

Mrs. Ganz said later she had rarely seen him as enthusiastic. Ganz was so sure that he told me not to

Informal History of the Air Corps Song- Continued

bother having the others recorded. He thought everything was settled and seemed to feel everything I still had to do a waste of time. I was inclined to feel the same way, but I had to fulfill my obligation as Chairman.

For historical purposes the other songs were:

Lohr?
W. M. L.
Give 'er the Gun - Ziman. Wings on High - Meredith Wilson. Spirit of the Air- Wings of the Nation.

The song that many wanted included in the competition was "Spirit of the Air Corps by Major William Clinch" an excellent song but, according to our experts, a steal on "On Brave Old Army Team" -Egner. We wanted and had been told the songs must be original and not reminiscent of any other song.

August '39 Decision was made to award the prize to Robert Crawford at the Cleveland Races in September.

A few changes were made in the song--title and words.

The melody was changed in bars 7-8 and 23-24.

Mr. Crawford composed the "Toast" to make the composition longer so that, at military formations, it could be played for marching. The Toast could also be used for solemn occasions. A band arrangement was made.

September '39 Prize awarded and I was told my work was not over. I must see that it became popular. No Army song can be popular until it has been used at formations that have

Informal History of Air Corps Song - Continued

some significance or under circumstances that are memorable. The Air Corps had few traditions and our country was at Peace.

EFFORTS MADE TO POPULARIZE A.C. OFFICIAL SONG.

After much thought, I decided the only thing I could do was build up an interest on the part of the Army and Air Corps in all the service songs.

1. The Army had not had a song book since the last war. Research at the library of Congress disclosed that edition did not contain songs from each Branch of the Service. I wanted a book that would be issued to each service man. Copyright releases were secured before I presented my plan to the Adjutant General. This project was concluded by a committee consisting of Colonel Harry Pheil, Major George Hinman, Harold Spivacke (head of the Music Division, Library of Congress) and Mrs. Barton K. Yount. With assistance of music copyist all the pieces were arranged for piano and voice and easily playable keys for guitar and ukulele. Each Chief of Branch in Washington "O.K." the song we included to represent their Branch of Service.

The Army
Song Book

Phonograph
Recording

2. I arranged for a band arrangement and the Army Band made a recording; a copy was sent to each Air Corps installation.

Informal History of the Air Corps Song - Continued

- Music** 3. The Publisher sent us five hundred copies that were sent out by the Chief's Office to the Air Corps.
- Performances** 4. With copies of the band arrangement, I canvassed each Service Band in Washington, and asked their assistance. They were most helpful and included in the medley of ~~the~~ ^{Service} famous song; the Air Corps official song.
- Bands** 5. With the help of Air Corps wives, we assembled some 45 sets of band arrangement and they were sent to each service band.
- West Point** 6. A visit to West Point urged that our Air Corps song be used at parades, West Point was most cooperative
- Commercial records** 7. R.C.A. was deaf to our appeal for a commercial record. They were approached personally and also by letter from the Chief's office.
- Crawford** 8. Mr. Crawford offered to help by flying ^{in his own plane} to the Air Corps stations and personally singing the song. This he did, but the idea did not "take", so we cancelled the rest of his tour.
- Dance Bands** 9. Carl Fischer sent copies of the song through the usual professional channels but publicity was needed to make all dance bands conscious there was an Air Corps as well as a Navy and Artillery and Marine Corps. Also, Carl Fischer is not well known as a publisher in "tin pan alley" where most popular songs are published.

Informal History of the Air Corps Song- Continued

September '39 10. Dance arrangement, band arrangement, quartet

arrangement requested from publisher. We still had no money to buy these for the various Air Corps installations. Carl Fisher did when they were published send us enough copies of the band arrangement to distribute.

January '39 Several times the Service bands played our song on the radio. The publisher gave us a radio release for such performances.

11. Efforts made to provide Service Clubs with musical instruments so they could use Army song book and become generally more music conscious.

Project for army song leaders still in abeyance.

Recruiting disks
or platters

12. Efforts made to have all Air Corps recruiting disks for aviation cadets use song as a theme song.

June '39 West Point's use of the A.C. Song made a most dignified impression, and more A.C. Personnel looked at it in a more favorable light. June week, graduation, the presence of the Chief of Air Corps at West Point and the fact that the other services liked the song.

January '40 The Army Song book was finished and in the hands of most personnel, but apathy still existed to any musical effort. Community sing films were looked into, but no money was available to have them made.

Informal History of the Air Corps Song - Continued

A few radio performances were arranged for and all Air Corps stations were provided with a copy of the radio release so that, if they had a chance to go on the air, they could use the song.

An effort was made to call it the Air Corps Official March and not Song.

January '41 The A.C. Song belonged to a member of A.S.C.P. ^A During this period, the networks were at war. A station using A.S.C.A.P. publications would not play B.M.I. publications. Therefore, on stations belonging to B.M.I., the Air Corps Song was not useable. Recruiting at this time was being planned in Washington and, on an extended scale, we succeeded in again contacting the unit that was planning the discs to be used by radio stations. At this time, we were only trying to build the song up as a theme song for the Air Corps.

July '41 In July 1941, Lt. Francis C. Healey, Public Relations Officer of the Western Flying Training Command, took an interest in the difficulties of the Chairman of the Air Corps Song to popularize it. He had done this sort of work for the Disney Studio and for Fred Astaire in Hollywood. Under his direction, we succeeded in interesting RKO, in their spare time (who volunteered as a gesture of friendship for Western Flying Training Command) to make a master recording orchestration with the R.K.O. Orchestra - 13 - and the

Informal History of the Air Corps Song - Continued

Kings' Men singing the song ^{and} on the other side of a dance arrangement by Kay Kyser. They donated this master record. Mr. Eric von der Goltz, in Carl Fisher's office contacted, in charge of Mr. Robert Crawford's interest. They donated hundreds of professional copies of the Air Corps Song and a hundred dollars in cash. With this money, we purchased copies of the master record-- a copy was sent to each bandmen in the United States appearing on any well-known program.

October '41 Some 250 in all; with a letter requesting that during the second week of January 1942, they played this song at the request of the cadets of the Western Flying Training Command.

November '41 A personal contact with Bing Crosby and the fact that he was interviewing an Air Corps Officer in one of his programs gave us our first spot on a big program in November 1941.

December 7, '41 All western, and some eastern studies, ^{had} in their possession on this date the music and a recording and letter for two months. We had not quite completed the Eastern Broadcasting companies. Most bandleaders were at least conscious of the fact that the Air Corps had an official song on this date.

January '42 All our hard work was almost completely nullified

Informal History of the Air Corps Song-Continued

in the East by direct order of Colonel Hans Christian Adamson, Deputy Director, Public Relations, AAF, Washington, D. C., who would not approve the request of Lt. Healey for the major networks in the East to play our song. Colonel Adamson's reasons were that the Air Corps had no official song. Lt. Healey contacted me and I asked Colonel Adamson to our apartment, where I was able to show him the Army Song Book with the magic word "official" over the Air Corps song, and give him a brief background of the Air Corps Song. Meanwhile, all the informal contacts Lt. Healey had been able to build up during a six-months period in the East on his spare time were cancelled because of the AAF Public Relations directive of Colonel Adamson.

April '42

This directive was rescinded by Colonel Adamson in April. So we started all over again, and sent more records and music to various name bands with the following result: By August 1942, the Air Corps Song was 8th in "Variety's" (NY's edition) on the 15 best sheet music sellers' list. In "Hollywood's Variety", it was 4th in the 10 best sellers' list. The song reached its peak about November when it was 3rd as a network song favorite. It remained among the 1st 10 favorites from August 1942 to January 1943. I

At LAST

August '42

SUCCESS

Informal History of the Air Corps Song- Continued

have no record of it since that time. During this period, everyone we came in contact with, who was in the Air Corps, we asked again, as in 1940, to ask at hotels and in night clubs for the Air Corps Song. In this way, hoping to make people throughout the country conscious of our theme song.

The war was on, and the Training Command had three radio units. Each radio unit used the Air Corps Song as a theme song. Bands were encouraged to use with bugles the first two bars of the song to call formations to ATTENTION (this was ^{first} just used by the Army Air Forces Band in Washington, D. C.) The singing program at the Technical Training Command was a magnificent one. Air Force Airs was published at this time and both piano edition and the pocket edition was donated to the Army Air Forces Aid Society by Mrs. B. K. Young. This contained the first publication of a French verse of the Air Corps Song. This compilation of Air Force Songs rapidly became obsolete and at present should be revised. The Training Command Special Services also published the words of the song so that each cadet could sing it.

Robert Crawford joined the Pan-American Air Ferries when it was organized in 1942. When Pan-American Air Ferries was organized early in 1942,

Informal History of the Air Corps Song --Continued

Crawford was one of the first key personnel. Later in the year, when A.T.C. took over the organization and absorbed it in the Army, an operational training unit was installed at Homestead, Florida, and Capt. Crawford was one of the three men who outlined and set up a training school for transport pilots and crews for overwater flights.

1943
Funeral
March

Since 1941, the Air Corps Song had been used by military bands at funerals without any special arrangement of it in a slow tempo. In 1943, Samuel Barbour volunteered to make a funeral arrangement for Army Band for Mrs. Barton K. Yount, and it is felt that this magnificent arrangement should be available to each Air Forces Chaplain and each Army Band. An arrangement should be made of it for organ.

