

IN THE ARMY NOW

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Fort Riley, Kansas, March 1st

As a civilian, I would often ask my friends who were musicians and already in uniform, what were the chances of finding a place in the army which might utilize musical training. Their replies were often vague or contradictory. In those days, now already part of the remote past, a musician functioning as such in the army seemed to me incomprehensible, completely out of keeping with its rigid structure. Today after a period of close observation from inside, the picture clarifies and even the general confusion becomes understandable.

There are three fields of musical activity in the military lay-out. Some of these are "authorized" – that is, they are activities for which the soldier is listed on the government payroll as a musician and has few other duties except as such. Some are "unauthorized" – they are activities limited to free time; their chief reward is that they relieve the soldier from such unpleasantnesses as kitchen police and guard duty. On occasion they provide concert trips to distant parts. To the civilian these rewards may seem insufficient, but in the army, believe you me they aren't. I've a beautiful pair of dishpan hands and a couple of feet that are very sore from trudging a moon-lit post, and I cherish a tender yearning for a landscape without a soldier or a barrack upon it. One becomes thankful for small mercies in the army.

Until a short time ago only members of the military band were authorized, and even they weren't always. But now many more bands have been included, also a musical director in the East, and for each post a small group of performers to provide music for stage shows. The quota of twenty-eight men which makes up a whole band in many cases remains unfilled for a considerable length of time until players are found. This is the largest field of musical activity and the oldest.

The second, that of the glee club, promises to assume much wider importance in this war than in the last. For one thing, the problem of

morale is greater. It has moreover been attacked earlier, and morale of officers have been given more support from the top. Choral organization has also been helped by the general step-up in the country's musical education during the last decades, and there are many experienced choristers in the ranks. The repertory is naturally made up of patriotic and "semi-classical" ditties plus some of the better known and less difficult "standard" pieces. At present the personnel connected with this work is not authorized, and perhaps, because of its nature, never will be.

The last field is the most diversified. It makes use of both amateurs and professionals. In each camp or even in each regiment or battalion, variety shows are organized that bring forward the would-be Bing Crosbys, the didn't-quite-make-it Borah Minnevides, the boy whose art was lavished on the moon, the Kentucky hills, the great open spaces. In the chapel, the organist and choir singers get their chance. On a more professional level are the dance band, which is made up usually of men from the military band, and the singers, violinists, and pianists whose work is valuable to the Public Relations Department since many of them perform for civilians in nearby communities rather than for the camp itself. In cases of the most outstanding of these latter, an effort is often made by the authorities to find a place in the cadre for them, thus keeping their services as artists available. For instance, a very gifted young pianist (he is also a talented machine-gunner - one Kansas critic aptly called his fingers "light but lethal") is officially a bartender at the Officers' Club here. In this capacity his duties are light and he is able to practice and fulfill concert engagements in the area.

There is perhaps one thing more which makes for confusion concerning what happens to musicians in the army. A soldier's musical status varies with his military status. As a trainee, unless he is a bandsman, his musical activity is restricted to after-training hours. In his regular regiment, however, special concessions are made and he is allowed more time and freedom.

Musicians who are called to the service will do well to make their abilities known as early as possible in their Army careers, and, during training, to be as good soldiers as possible.

At the moment, to the best of my knowledge, this is the status of the musician in the army. But the whole situation might be drastically altered within a day's time. Such quick changes occur often, and almost inexplicably, but that's the Army, and this is War.