

## MEET THE BAND

### BACKGROUND ESSAY

In July 1861, the United States War Department required every infantry, artillery, or cavalry regiment to have a twenty-four-man band. The main instruments were trombones, tubas, bugles, and drums. Sometimes there were fifes. These bands were called “brass bands.”

As the war dragged on, it was difficult to follow this requirement, but music was very important. About one out of every forty-one soldiers in the Union Army was a musician. There was a similar number in the Confederate Army.



Bands played in the camps, especially the night before a battle. Often the Union and Confederate camps were within hearing distance of each other. Sometimes there was a “battle of the bands.” Each side would play their favorite tunes. On at least three occasions, the bands on opposite sides played “Home, Sweet Home” together.

Musicians also accompanied the troops into battle. Buglers played different calls that gave battle commands. Drummers provided the rhythm for troops marching into battle. Sometimes whole songs were played during a battle. General Robert E. Lee once said, “I don't think we could have an army without music.”

Even today, music is considered essential for the military. The mission of the United States Army Band is “to provide music throughout the spectrum of military operations to instill in our soldiers the will to fight and win, foster the support of our citizens, and promote our national interests at home and abroad.”