



"PERSHING'S OWN" "THE ARMY GOES ROLLING ALONG" UNITED STATES ARMY BAND

Army: Don't Forget To Sing the First Verse of the Army Song

By Pablo Villa

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For nearly six decades, "The Army Goes Rolling Along" has served as the official song of the U.S. Army. Played at countless Army ceremonies, deployments and homecomings, its soaring chorus is a musical mainstay for Soldiers and NCOs. The song's reach has even stretched into television and film.

But for quite some time, it has lacked one vital component, according to a recent ALARACT message.

"It's the preamble," said Sgt. Maj. Paul A. Murtha, chief arranger for the United States Army Band, "Pershing's Own," at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va. "It's the part of the song that leads you into the chorus. That's what hasn't been played."

The All Army Activities message, ALARACT 124/2013, released on May 13, directs that whenever the official song of the Army is performed, it will begin with a short introduction, then the verse, followed by the chorus and then the refrain. Commanders are to ensure that all Soldiers learn the lyrics of the song and stand and sing when it is performed.

The chorus ("First to fight, for the right/And to build the nation's might...") is the popular melody that many

recognize as the beginning of the song. However, the verse has fallen into relative anonymity, Murtha said.

Murtha, who holds a bachelor's degree in music education from Duquesne University and who has been a part of the storied "Pershing's Own" band since 1996, says he is not sure why the Army is reiterating the need for Army bands to play the introductory verse of the song, nor is he certain when leaving the verse out of performances became commonplace. He even concedes that most Army bands haven't practiced how to play it. But he says Army bands will have no issue following through with the directive.

"The verse has been part of the song since 1956," Murtha said. "So it's not something new. It's just something we haven't used in the past."

Murtha says MP3 files, sheet music, lyrics and regulations for the Army song are available online at <http://bands.army.mil/music/armysong/>. Army band directors can use information from the website for practice sessions. Likewise, NCOs can use materials from the site to help their Soldiers learn the lyrics to the song.

According to the Army Bands' website, the Army


song was originally written by field artillery 1st Lt. Edmund L. Gruber in 1908 when he was stationed in the Philippines. The song originally reflected the day-to-day operations of a horse-drawn field artillery battery and was known as the “Caisson Song.” John Philip Sousa transformed it into a march in 1917 under the name “The Field Artillery Song.”

In 1956, it was adopted as the official song of the Army and re-titled, “The Army Goes Rolling Along.” The current lyrics tell the story of the Army’s past, present and future. The song is played at the conclusion of every U.S. Army ceremony, and all Soldiers are expected to stand and sing.

For Murtha, the song’s rich history makes for a powerful occasion each time it’s played. And while the recent directive to learn and play the song in full will create some stressful moments as Soldiers learn the introductory verse, it will remind them of the Army’s illustrious

past.

“There will probably be some negative reaction,” Murtha said. “I think everybody will calm down once everybody gets used to it, and we’ll keep ‘rolling along’ — like the Army does.”■



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