

'Pershing's Own' NCOs Shine during Inaugural Festivities

By Martha C. Koester, NCO Journal

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Sgt. Maj. Julian R. Ayers Sr., the drum major for U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," leads the band during a rehearsal on Summerall Field at Fort Myer, Virginia. The band was preparing for the inaugural parade. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

The ceremonial splendor on display during inaugural festivities never fails to transfix the Soldiers of The U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," whether it's their first presidential inauguration or their sixth. The band's noncommissioned officers fully understand their responsibility in representing the Army and their fellow Soldiers on that global stage.





The baton of Sgt. Maj. Julian R. Ayers Sr., the drum major for U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," lies on the ground during a rehearsal on Summerall Field at Fort Myer, Virginia. The band was preparing for the inaugural parade. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

"When we put on that uniform, we want to make sure that we are representing Soldiers absolutely the best we can," said Sgt. Maj. Jerry J. Amoury, the senior enlisted leader for The U.S. Army Concert Band. "We provide musical support and we represent the Army, but are also there to represent our brothers and sisters in uniform. If there is an NCO who is downrange and they see us marching [in the inauguration parade], I want them to know that we think about them when we put our uniform on."

Tradition dictates that the 99-piece band, which is made up of members of the Ceremonial Band, Concert Band and the Army Blues jazz ensemble, lead the official Presidential Escort down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., from the Capitol to the White House parade reviewing stand. The band has held the honor since March 4, 1925, during President Calvin Coolidge's second inauguration. Joining "Pershing's Own" in this celebrated custom are honor platoons from every branch of service and Maj. Gen. Bradley A. Becker, the commanding general of the Military District of Washington.



Members of the U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own" rest during a rehearsal on Summerall Field at Fort Myer, Virginia. The band was preparing for the inaugural parade. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

At the reviewing stand, another team from "Pershing's Own" takes over. The U.S. Army Herald Trumpets are ready to welcome the new president to the White House by playing the famous "Hail to the Chief" anthem.

On Jan. 11, then President-elect Donald J. Trump sung the band's praises during a news conference.

"I look very much forward to the inauguration," Trump said. "It's going to be a beautiful event. We have great talent, tremendous talent, and we have all of the bands ... from different segments of the military. And I've heard some of these bands over the years. They're incredible."

Lessons Learned

The elite musicians perform in countless high-profile events for the Army during their careers and are seasoned professionals. Major events such as the inauguration give the band's NCOs an opportunity to bring their leadership training to the forefront.



Staff Sgt. Sidonie H. Wade (center), a percussionist for U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," marches during a rehearsal on Summerall Field at Fort Myer, Virginia. The band was preparing for the inaugural parade. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

"Any training opportunity is a great opportunity for an NCO because that is what we do: We train, we educate, we prepare the future of the Army," said Sgt. Maj. Julian R. Ayers Sr., the band's drum major. Ayers performed at his fifth inauguration Jan. 20. "These experiences certainly help me to figure out how I can be a better leader. The way I see my role, the band is outstanding, all I need to do is provide Soldiers with the avenues for success. I try my best not to get in their way and give them all the information that they need. Then I let them fly, and I just stand up in the front and dance and do my thing."

After 27 years in the Army and performing in five inaugurations, Amoury said Trump's inauguration would be his last. Amoury said he has used such events to impress upon Soldiers the importance of how much their participation matters.

"I have told this to many people over my years: You don't think that what you are doing is important, but you are going to get that phone call from an aunt or an uncle or an old teacher or someone in your town saying, 'I saw you do something,'" he said. "We just did something for the CBS This Morning show a couple months ago. [CBS This Morning's] Charles Osgood retired, and he is a former member of the Army Band. I can't tell you how many calls I have received. An old trombone teacher said, 'I saw you on television.' It's not me, it's the organization."





The U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," marches down Sheridan Avenue during a rehearsal at Fort Myer, Virginia. The band was preparing for the inaugural parade. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

"And so as an NCO you really are actually doing something that's going to be remembered," Amoury said. "You matter, and sometimes you don't get that feeling as an NCO because you are always answering to other people. You are more of an enforcer, less of a planner. I have been lucky because I have had a lot of great NCO mentors in my career who have done that for me. I just hope to pass that [knowledge] on to my peers and my colleagues, the people who are going to replace me. It's all about setting up your replacements for success because my replacement is already in the building somewhere. So if I am not preparing those folks to do my job, then I fail as an NCO."

Whirlwind of Activity

Members of "Pershing's Own" began preparing for the inauguration well before the main event. One of the many rehearsals included a full-dress rehearsal of marching down Constitution Avenue in Downtown Washington, D.C., in the early morning hours the Sunday before Inauguration Day. In between other rehearsals, band members also performed a number of gigs, which included Army ceremonies for members of the Cabinet. The day before the inauguration, "Pershing's Own" was tasked with opening the Making America Great Again Concert at the Lincoln Memorial.

Performing at many high profile events never loses its luster for Staff Sgt. Sidonie H. Wade, who performed at her first inauguration.



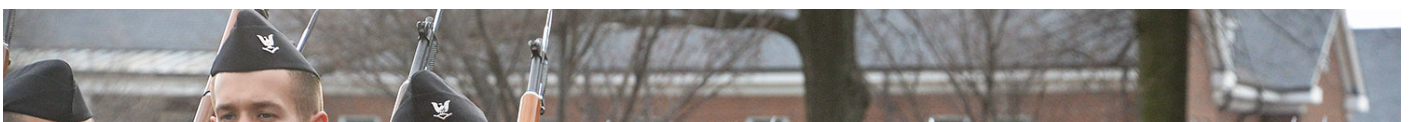


Sgt. Maj. Julian R. Ayers Sr., the drum major for U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," demonstrates baton moves he will use during a rehearsal on Summerall Field at Fort Myer, Virginia. The band was preparing for the inaugural parade. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

"Being in the Army, we are able to participate and be a part of history every single day, which is extremely cool," Wade, a percussionist in the band, said. "Living in the District of Washington and working in the military district of Washington, there's just so much history happening all the time. History is being made on a daily basis in the Army, and it's really cool. It's really humbling."

Some members of "Pershing's Own" even took part in the pre-planning of the inauguration, working with the Presidential Inaugural Committee and the Joint Force Headquarters – National Capitol Region leadership. Amoury served as a planner for President Barack Obama's second inauguration in 2013.

The PIC, a private organization, is one of three entities who take charge of inauguration festivities and celebrations. The Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies plans the swearing-in ceremonies of the president-elect and the vice president-elect. The Joint Force Headquarters – National Capitol Region is responsible for planning military support for the inauguration and many of the parade logistics. Lastly, the PIC is in charge of planning and funding all of the events surrounding the swearing-in ceremony.





Following the U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," members of military rifle guards march down Sheridan Avenue during a rehearsal at Fort Myer, Virginia. The groups were preparing for the inaugural parade. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

"The inauguration is a very coordinated, cue-driven event," Amoury said. "I was a supporter for the music playing lists of the ceremony, so I got to see a different side of it."

Ayers hopes "Pershing's Own's" performance inspires NCOs watching events such as the inauguration.

"I want them to appreciate and understand the importance of Army music," he said. "Military music has such a great importance in the lives of the American people."

As Amoury gets ready to transition, he has many past performances with "Pershing's Own" upon which to reflect.

"The thing about being in this job is that I have a lot of these [memories]," Amoury said. "Being in front of people who are world leaders or people who are global opinion leaders, and you are there — a trombone player — standing in the White House. It's kind of ludicrous to think, 'Well, what am I doing here?' but the job requires my presence. I get to see people who are impacting lives all over the world. To see American government, an American leadership working, and living and talking, people don't see that very often. These are real people doing real jobs, and it's not frivolous. They take it seriously, and we get to see that a lot. It's exciting, and it's humbling. That's the stuff I always take away from these kinds of jobs — the energy, the moment."