

James Reese Europe and World War I

No jazz for you: We'll play a brisk French march
and show our ribbons, flash our *croix de guerre*
(yes, we learned French, too) all the way
until we reach 110th Street and yes! take our turn
onto Lenox Avenue and all those brown faces and then--

Baby, Here Comes Your Daddy Now!

--- Rita Dove, *The Return of Lieutenant James Reese Europe*

Introduction

Throughout history music has played certain roles in armed conflict, and developed a more and more sophisticated form as the national military bands through the last few centuries. By the time World War I broke out, its importance had been already recognised by all the major powers, including the United States.¹ Along with other prestigious military bands from the allied countries such as Britain, France, Italy, James Reese Europe organised and led a unique military band in his service in World War I. This essay purports to shed a new light on the achievement of Europe by examining in particular his strategic, rather than musical, contribution.

Being a prominent black bandleader at the beginning of the twentieth century, Europe's achievement has been, more often than not, discussed in relation to the development of ragtime and jazz as formal music categories.² For instance, Gunther Schuller puts him as 'the most important transitional figure in the prehistory of jazz on the East Coast'.³ Indeed, even before the official beginning of the 'Jazz Age' in the 1920s,⁴ he attempted to develop 'a kind of symphony music

¹ The strategic significance of military bands was acknowledged in the United States well before the First World War, even in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. For an interesting account of the US military music in this period, see Warren P. Howe, 'Early American Military Music' in *American Music*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp. 87-116

² Symbolically, the rediscovery of Europe was begun by Samuel B. Charters and Leonard Kunstadt, *Jazz: History of the New York Scene* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962). R. Reid Badger, who wrote an excellent biography of Europe, also focused on this aspect in his shorter essay, 'James Reese Europe and the Prehistory of Jazz' in *American Music*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Special Jazz Issue (Spring, 1989), pp. 48-67

³ Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 249-250

⁴ Although the history of jazz is fluid, there is still consensus to certain extent. Europe's career in the 1900s and 1910s was clearly on the very early stage of that history. Scott DeVeaux, 'Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz

that... is different and distinctive, and that lends itself to the playing of the peculiar compositions of our race.’⁵ While it seems quite correct to put him in the historical context of black music and jazz, far less study has been done to other aspects of his feats.

However, considering the wider background of the international affairs at the time, it is very important that the strategic aspect of Europe’s contribution is discussed in order to produce a more nuanced evaluation of his achievements, not limited to the purely musical terms. Leading the famed military band of the 369th Infantry Regiment - nicknamed ‘The Harlem Hellfighters’ - of the American Expeditionary Force, Europe expanded the role of the US military bands in the first modern total war in human history. World War I proved to be characterised by its tightly-woven bipolar alliance system and its totality that involved all the citizens of the belligerent countries. The public support from both combatants and civilians was crucial to sustain the war efforts. Europe and his band by and large successfully fulfilled the new tasks for military bands in the war of that particular nature; they not only played for recruitment, ceremonies, and the soldiers’ morale in combat, but also played a significant role in boosting the civilian morale and fostering the cultural affiliation between the US and its allied European peoples, especially the French. Their exotic, and indeed unique, sound helped them accomplish these new missions on the foreign soil.

This essay is structured as below. The first section briefly discusses how the role of US military bands has developed, in conjunction with the new and special characteristics of World War I as the first total war in history. It suggests what the new mode of warfare demanded from the US military bands. The second section then traces the literature to illustrate how Europe and his band developed the peculiar sound of their own, as well as how their performances affected the US soldiers and the allied European people, primarily the French citizens, during and after the war. It applies the descriptions of Europe’s and his band’s contribution to the historical framework suggested in the first section, and lead to conclusion.

Historiography’ in *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Literature of Jazz Issue (Autumn, 1991), pp. 525-560

⁵ James Reese Europe, ‘Negro’s Place in Music’ in *New York Evening Post* (13 March, 1914), reprinted in Robert Kimball & William Bolcom, *Reminiscing with Sissle and Blake* (New York: Viking, 1973), pp. 60-61

Chapter 1: Brief History of the US Military Bands

This section presents a brief history of the US military bands spanning from the colonial period, through the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, up to World War I, when James Reese Europe organised his peculiar military band. By the time of the US involvement in the Great War, the US military bands had come to be expected to perform a number of roles in a battlefield. This section illustrates the history of the US military bands, rather than that of black music, as a framework within which to evaluate Europe and his band in the following section.

The modern form of military music originates from the European cultural tradition,⁶ and the music scenes in the American thirteen colonies were heavily influenced by the European countries, especially Britain.⁷ While all the army musicians - primarily fifers and drummers at the time - were skilled professionals and highly regarded in the British military,⁸ the colonies had yet to organise their own military bands with sufficient size and structure,⁹ because they generally depended on the British Empire for their defense and security from external threats. Moreover, military bands were often socially associated with sovereign authority and viewed as a national symbol;¹⁰ no nation, no military bands. It was thus not until the two British military bands stationed in Boston for the French and Indian War, from 1767 to 1770, gave small public concerts that the typical regimental band materialised in the colonies.¹¹

‘Concerts such as this prompted Josiah Flagg, a renowned colonial composer and concert master, to establish an American band patterned after the British model. In 1773, he created a band of over fifty musicians and gave a series of concerts at Boston’s

⁶ Wind and brass instruments, which characterise military bands, were themselves the product of the European art tradition. See Trevor Herbert and Margaret Sarkissian, ‘Victorian Bands and Their Dissemination in the Colonies’ in *Popular Music*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Core and Periphery: Routes in British Popular Music History 1850-1980 (May, 1997), pp. 165-179

⁷ Although immigrants from various European backgrounds brought with them a rich collection of musical traditions into the colonies, military bands were a distinctive form of music that was almost exclusively shaped by a handful of such major military powers as Britain, France, and Germany. See Ronald F. Kingsley and Michael R. Edson, ‘The Military Musician in Eighteenth-Century America: A View from Fort Ticonderoga’ in *New York History*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (Summer 2001), pp. 213-230

⁸ Trevor Herbert and Margaret Sarkissian, *ibid*, p. 166

⁹ Paul Francis Erwin, ‘Bands, Bandmasters and Bandstands: A Search for Public Support in Democracy’ in *Journal of American Culture*, pp. 55-60, esp. p. 56

¹⁰ Trevor Herbert and Margaret Sarkissian, *ibid*, p. 166

¹¹ Paul Francis Erwin, *ibid*, p. 56-57

Faneuil Hall. These concerts were not very successful, but at least the initial undertaking provided the basis for future wind band concerts in the colonies.¹²

The official beginning of history of the US military bands had to wait until the United States emerged as a formal, sovereign nation-state.

The Revolutionary War witnessed, or indeed necessitated, a formal organisation of the first American military band - the Fife and Drum Corps in the Continental Army - even though still under a heavy European cultural influence.¹³ In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century battlefields, field military musicians, especially fifers and drummers, served a variety of tactical purposes in addition to the ceremonial; they not only boosted the soldiers' morale through recreational performance, but also communicated commands and regulated marching and camp formations.¹⁴ Their musical performance was vital to the regular operations of an army at the time. In the early days of the Revolution, however, the Continental Army 'lacked organization and overall policies, including those relating to music.'¹⁵ Aware of the essential need of its own military band, the Army leadership - none other than General George Washington himself - appointed John Hiwell, a lieutenant and fife major of the 3rd Continental Artillery Regiment, as a subordinate inspector responsible for standardization and supervision of music.¹⁶ He was 'responsible for the Continental Army's fife and drum capability - the training of musicians and the provision of instruments and accessories.'¹⁷ Consequently, at least one fifer and one drummer were assigned to each company as field musicians and accompanied the soldiers to battle, while the band of music consisting of two trumpets, two French horns, two bassoons, and four oboes or clarinets, mostly maintained civilian

¹² Kenneth R. Force, *British Band Concepts in America* (New York: Valencia Press Inc., 1967), pp. 1-2

¹³ Kenneth R. Force, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Warren P. Howe, 'Early American Military Music' in *American Music*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp. 87-116, esp. pp. 87-88

¹⁵ Warren P. Howe, *ibid.*, p. 88

¹⁶ This appointment was in accordance with the recommendations of the Prussian Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus von Steuben, who was hired by the Army for general military supervision and authored *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*. See Warren P. Howe, *ibid.*, pp. 89-90, and, for more details, Raul F. Camus's doctoral dissertation, 'The Military Band in the United States Army Prior to 1834' (New York University, 1969)

¹⁷ Warren P. Howe, *ibid.*, p. 90. He also suggests that 'The Drummer's Book of Music', held by the Massachusetts Historical Society's Manuscript Collection in Boston, illustrates the Revolution-era drum signals or calls that are almost identical to the descriptions by von Steuben's *Regulations*.

status and played exclusively for ceremonial or recreational purposes.¹⁸ Following the European traditions, it ‘demonstrate(d) the growing administrative sophistication of the newly independent confederation of former colonies and its Army.’¹⁹

After the Revolutionary War, the federal armed forces established some official military bands. Highly appreciative of the role of music through the Revolution, General James Wilkinson, then chief of the Army, inspired the 2nd US Infantry to organise a band in 1798; President John Adams and the Congress authorised the creation of the United States Marine Corps and the United States Marine Band attached to it. The band, famously known as ‘The President’s Own’, included thirty-two drummers and fifers, one drum major and one fife major.²⁰ The Corps of Artillerists also formed another band of six or eight musicians in the Washington, D.C..²¹ These official military bands sophisticated their organisation through their own publication of manuals, such as *A New, Useful, and Complete System of Drum Beating* written in 1812 by Charles Ashworth, a drum major of the Marine Band.²²

The American Civil War marks another major source of scholarly debate about the US military bands, as it was in the midst of military transition into modern warfare.²³ While unskilled adolescent boys were trained as field musicians after recruitment, the military bands consisted of professional bandsmen who had previously had civilian musical careers in local community bands.²⁴ The distinction between field musicians and bandsmen remained generally strict; the former accompanied their regiments into battle, while the latter played exclusively for ceremonial

¹⁸ See Ronald F. Kingsley and Michael R. Edson, ‘The Military Musician in Eighteenth-Century America: A View from Fort Ticonderoga’ in *New York History*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (Summer 2001), pp. 213-230. The practice of hiring private band musicians for special ceremonial occasions directly originates from the British custom. In addition, Kingsley and Edson also point out that the English military bands, after which the US bands were modeled, had the same instrumentation as the German’s, except for the introduction of a clarinet (ibid, p. 215). It seems that, either directly or indirectly, the early US military bands were much influenced by the German tradition as well as the British.

¹⁹ Warren P. Howe, ibid, p. 99

²⁰ Warren P. Howe, ibid, p. 104. See also the official website of the band available at: <http://www.marineband.marines.mil> (last visited on 14th January, 2015).

²¹ Warren P. Howe, ibid, p. 105

²² Warren P. Howe, ibid, p. 105

²³ James A. Davis, ‘Music and Gallantry in Combat During the American Civil War’ in *American Music*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer 2010), pp. 141-172

²⁴ Bruce P. Gleason, ‘U.S. Mounted Bands and Cavalry Field Musicians in the Union Army during the Civil War-Background, Duties, and Training’ in *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), pp. 102-119, esp. p. 118.

or recreational purposes.²⁵ Nevertheless, a major difference of the Civil War from the previous armed conflicts was that a military brass band was 'present in practically every military confrontation,'²⁶ meaning that a battlefield witnessed actual pieces of music in addition to commanding signals.²⁷ Both the Union Army and the Confederate Army extensively utilised regimental bands. A number of popular scores, including 'Yankee Doodle', 'Star Spangled Banner', 'Home, Sweet Home,' and 'Dixie',²⁸ to name but a few, bolstered troop motivation and confidence, as well as soothed and calmed their nerves immediately before or after battle.²⁹ As such, the bandsmen often found themselves on the front firing line, and were sometimes even ordered to lead a cavalry charge.³⁰

Thus, the US military bands increased their strategic significance in roughly one and a half centuries from the late colonial period until the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to the essential need of field musicians as signalers, the US band of music developed to play a unique role in maintaining the soldiers' mental conditions in an increasingly lethal environment of the modern warfare. It is also important to note that, up until the beginning of the twentieth century, the African-Americans were shut out of a leading position in the US Army bands. All of the regimental bands assigned to each of the four regular all-black regiments in the US Army after the Civil War were headed by a white man as chief musician.³¹ Although the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the Philippine Insurrection of 1899-1902 raised reputations of the black bandsmen, the highest

²⁵ James A. Davis, *ibid.* Gleason, *ibid.*, points out that the distinction between the two entities remained firm until the advent of telephone and radio communication, which obviously eliminated the need for field musicians as signalers. Please note this custom of British tradition was inherited from the colonial period as mentioned above (note 16).

²⁶ James A. Davis, *ibid.*, p. 144

²⁷ It was partly due to the change of instrumentation in military bands. The keyed brass instruments such as bugles were introduced around 1815, followed by the rotary- or piston-valved instruments such as saxhorns and trombones. During the reform of the 1830s and 1840s, the complete scales and tuning flexibility of this instrumentation allowed a larger repertoire of music. See Bruce P. Gleason, *ibid.*, esp. p. 103-105. Herbert and Sarkissian, mentioned above, also illustrate the development of brass instruments.

²⁸ John Druessedow, 'Music of the Civil War Era: A Discography' in *Sound Recording Reviews* (September 2003), pp. 240-254. He points out that these songs predated the years of the conflict, but were nonetheless strongly associated with the war thereafter.

²⁹ See James A. Davis, *ibid.* He presents an interesting historical case of the role of military bands in conjunction with gallantry, the nineteenth-century US version of the medieval cavalry codes and gentleman-ship.

³⁰ Bruce P. Gleason, *ibid.*

³¹ Peter M. Lefferts, 'U.S. Army Black Regimental Bands and the Appointments of Their First Black Bandmasters' in *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2, (Fall 2013), pp. 151-175, esp. pp. 151-152

position that could be held by them was 'principal musician' - ranked second to chief musician.³² However, Emmet J. Scott, personal secretary to Booker T. Washington, successfully lobbied William H. Taft and Theodore Roosevelt to replace these white bandmasters; all the four black regimental bands received black bandleaders by September 1909.³³ This move at the beginning of the twentieth century was an essential cornerstone that enabled James Reese Europe's successful career as a military bandleader during World War I.

World War I proved to be the first total war in human history, and its new characteristics required the US military bands to perform a different set of missions, in addition to those previously known. The war efforts were twofold - the European battlefields where soldiers dug hundreds of miles of trenches and the so-called home front where the governments mobilised all the national resources including personnel, heavy industrial production, and a large sum of wartime budget to sustain the former.³⁴ First of all, therefore, just as the US federal government under the Woodrow Wilson administration enacted the Selective Service Act of 1917, all the major belligerent states organised a mass-conscripted army. A large number of ordinary citizens entered military service. The US Army thus needed to boost recruitment, for which a military band proved to be a strong device of advertisement. Second, the tight bipolar alliance system necessitated a close multilateral military coordination on an unprecedented scale. Military bands were needed, and indeed ideally positioned, to facilitate the cross-cultural trust building, because music, and in this case jazz in particular, could appeal to people of all the cultural backgrounds.³⁵ Therefore, in comparison with the previous wars, the US military bands needed to perform more to ensure public support domestically and foster international cooperation with its allied forces in Europe.

³² Peter M. Lefferts, *ibid*, p. 152-155

³³ Peter M. Lefferts, *ibid*, traces the process of these postings since the race riot in Brownsville, Texas, in 1906.

³⁴ As is commonly known, the US had achieved the largest economy in the world by the end of the nineteenth century, and upon its declaration of war against Germany, the US Congress enacted the Emergency Loan Act of 1917 to authorise the issue of the so-called 'Liberty Bond'.

³⁵ The effect of music seems to be almost universally present. For an account of various roles expected from contemporary military bands, see Graham, E. Lowell, 'Music in the Military: It's about Influence' in *American Music Teacher* (December 2004/January 2005), pp. 34-36

Chapter 2: James Reese Europe and ‘The Harlem Hellfighters’ Band

James Reese Europe and the 369th Infantry Regiment Band joined the World War I battlefield in Europe from the beginning of 1918. This chapter examines their performance and consider its strategic implications in light of the historical development outlined in the previous section. It does not fully illustrate Europe’s musical careers in civilian capacity, but rather focuses on his military contribution. Additionally, while a detailed examination of the musical peculiarity of the band is beyond the parameters of the present study, it would merit some mentions to the extent that their musical quality contributed to their accomplishing the strategic purposes.

James Reese Europe was born on 22nd February, 1880, in Mobile, Alabama.³⁶ Both of his parents, Henry and Lorraine Saxon Europe, were fond of music, and James, along with his brothers and sisters, exhibited interests in their initial musical lessons from early ages.³⁷ The family moved to Washington, D.C. in 1889, where James started to learn his first musical instrument, violin. His musical interests, ‘out-going personality’ and ‘natural organizational ability’ led James to the high school cadets. Military drill was one of the most popular extracurricular activities in the M Street High School, and it would prove useful to James later in his service in the Great War.³⁸ Moreover, the member of the US Marine Band stationed at Washington offered James the piano and violin instructions.³⁹ These early experiences ‘provided the foundation for Europe’s later successes as a composer of marches and as a leader of a military band during World War I’.⁴⁰ Europe further moved to the New York City in late 1902 or early 1903, since the metropolis was known to have more job opportunities for African-American musicians.⁴¹ After picking up mandolin, instead of violin, he began to earn steady employment and established himself as composer and orchestra director through the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴² Tin Pan Alley published several of his

³⁶ Badger, R. Reid, *A Life in Ragtime: A Biography of James Reese Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2007), Chapter 1, p. 1

³⁷ Badger, R. Reid, *ibid*, Chapter 1, p. 7. It is known that his mother gave her children some piano lessons.

³⁸ Badger, R. Reid, *ibid*, Chapter 2, pp. 6-7

³⁹ Badger, R. Reid, *ibid*, Chapter 2, pp. 4-5

⁴⁰ Badger, R. Reid, *ibid*, Chapter 2, p. 7

⁴¹ Badger, R. Reid, *ibid*, Chapter 3, p. 2

⁴² His struggle in New York music industry is detailed in David Gilbert, ‘Clef Club Inc.: James Reese Europe and New York’s Musical Marketplace’ in *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, Vol. 24, Issue 4, Pages 430–456

popular compositions including 'Blue Eyed Sue', while musical theatres witnessed James to direct the orchestra for musical shows such as 'A Trip to Africa' and 'The Shoo-Fly Regiment'. He was not only successful commercially, but also keenly concerned about African-American's racial progress in America.⁴³ One of his major achievements prior to the war was the foundation of the Clef Club in 1910, as 'a combined trade union and booking agency' for black musicians in New York. Elected as its the first president, he also organized the Clef Club Orchestra with peculiar instrumentation to take advantage of their ethnic musical sense; the orchestra replaced the second violin with mandolins and banjos, oboes with clarinets, and French horns with baritone horns, because Europe regarded them more suitable for the musical sense of his own race.⁴⁴ Their performance at the Carnegie Hall in 1912 'stormed that bastion of the white musical establishment' with 'its "very imposing and seductively rhythmic" character'.⁴⁵ Europe thus built up a successful civilian career and became one of the most famous black orchestra leader in New York before the commencement of the World War I.

In September 1916, Europe, in spite of his heavy schedules in civilian life, decided to join the newly formed all-black regiment - 15th Infantry Regiment (Colored) of the New York National Guard. The decision was primarily due to his racial awareness.⁴⁶ Europe told Noble L. Sissle, his close friend and fellow musician, 'I have been in New York for sixteen years, and there has never been such an organization of Negro men that will bring together all classes of men for a common good. And our race will never amount to anything, politically or economically, in New York or anywhere else unless there are strong organizations of men who stand for something in the

⁴³ Anthropologist William Shack states 'Europe was considered a "Race Man", a person filled with pride in his race and strong commitment to racial progress', as cited by Thabiti Asukile, 'J. A. Rogers' "Jazz at Home": Afro-American Jazz in Paris During the Jazz Age' in *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 22-35

⁴⁴ Ron Welburn, 'James Reese Europe and the Infancy of Jazz Criticism' in *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 7, No. (1987), pp. 35-44.

⁴⁵ R. Reid Badger, 'James Reese Europe and the Prehistory of Jazz' in *American Music*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Special Jazz Issue (Spring, 1989), pp. 48-67, esp. pp. 50-51. The significance of the concert is also discussed in detail in Olly Wilson, 'The Black-American Composer and the Orchestra in the Twentieth Century' in *The Black Perspective in Music*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Special Issue: Black American Music Symposium 1985 (Winter, 1986), pp. 26-34

⁴⁶ R. Reid Badger, *A Life in Ragtime*, Chapter 11, p. 3. He is argued elsewhere that he adopted 'a racially authentic approach to professional musicianship based on popular music and the stage', which was also reflected on his way of organising a new military band. See John Anthony Aveni, "Such Music as Befits the New Order of Things: African American Professional Musicians and the Cultural Identity of a Race, 1880-1920." Order No. 3153537 Rutgers The State University of New Jersey - New Brunswick, 2004. Ann Arbor: *ProQuest*. Web. 10 Jan. 2015.

community.’⁴⁷ Although initially enlisted as a private in a machine gun company, Europe was asked by Colonel William Hayward, commander of the new regiment, to organize their regimental band because Hayward ‘understood... that successful recruiting depended in large part on showmanship’ if he was to form a fully recognised all-black regiment. Europe in turn requested at least 44 bandsmen with about \$15,000 of budget to create the best military band in the country. Both of these conditions were unheard of in the US military before, when Army regimental bands had been regulated to consist of exactly 28 pieces.⁴⁸ Europe deemed it necessary for playing well-balanced music.⁴⁹ After Hayward’s financial struggle and Europe’s recruitment of Puerto Rican musicians for the reed section,⁵⁰ they were finally able to assemble the band with sufficient, though unusual, size and funding.

First, the band proved successful in fulfilling their role in recruitment. Sissle recalls, ‘the band certainly played an important part in the recruiting of the 15th and with its help our regiment was the first National Guard unit in New York State to reach war strength.’⁵¹ The Harlem’s own 15th Infantry Regiment Band gave its first public concert at the Manhattan Casino on 22 June, 1917, and the performance was quite well received by the audience.⁵² In the following weeks the band played jazz tunes such as ‘Memphis Blues’ and ‘Army Blues’ from a bus running through the colored sections of the city, and drove many youngsters into the recruiting office. Soldiers often said “‘if it hadn’t been for that damned band I wouldn’t be in the army””.⁵³ Consequently, the

⁴⁷ Noble Lee Sissle, *Memoirs of Lieutenant “Jim” Europe* (October, 1942), NAACP Records 1940–55, Group II, J Box 56, General Miscellany, Library of Congress, p. 36. Sissle was a fellow bandsman and a close friend of Europe’s, who helped his organising the band from the beginning.

⁴⁸ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 11, pp. 4-6.

⁴⁹ Indeed, his opinion was later confirmed by General Pershing’s decision to increase the number of bandsmen from 28 to 48. Europe’s pioneering orchestration was probably a very important factor to his success. Jay G. Ruckel, ‘Tunes of Glory: The Proud Tradition of the Military Band’ in *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 6 (Feb., 1971), pp. 48-50

⁵⁰ Daniel F. Reid, a director of U.S. Steel Corporation and American Can Company provided a check for \$10,000. Having received the money, Europe, to Hayward’s astonishment, proposed to recruit some musicians from Puerto Rico. See Arthur W. Little, *From Harlem to the Rhine: The Story of New York’s Colored Volunteers* (New York: Covici and Friede, 1936), pp. 120-122. Europe’s advertisement of

⁵¹ Noble Lee Sissle, *ibid*, p. 72

⁵² R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 11, pp. 30-31

⁵³ Noble Lee Sissle, *ibid*, p. 72-73

regiment achieved war strength of 2,000 troops and 54 officers by 15 July, 1917, when the regiment was formally mustered into active service in the US Army.⁵⁴

The band did not fail to entertain the US troops and citizens alike. At the Camp Whitman, where the regiment entered field training, and Camp Dix, the band practiced and performed evening concerts before thousands of draftees on almost daily basis. 'As the reputation of the 15th Regiment's band began to spread, they began receiving invitations to perform outside the camp as well.'⁵⁵ The regiment moved further to Camp Wadsoworth in Spartanburg, South Carolina, where the tensions between black and white citizens were very severe and the regiment was clearly not welcomed by the local population.⁵⁶ Colonel Hayward proposed the 15th Regiment band perform an evening concert in the public square to improve the situation. The concert itself was well received, even though it could not prevent some incidents of physical abuse and insult by the white locals.⁵⁷ The tensions became intolerable, and, consequently, the regiment was ordered to be sent to France immediately.

The ship that carried the 15th Infantry Regiment across the Atlantic, *Pocahontas*, arrived at the French coast on the New Years Day 1918, and the band started its long journey throughout the country. Their arrival was marked with the band's performance of the French national anthem, 'Marseillaise', characterised by 'the novelty of Europe's rhythmic arrangement and the band's spirited interpretation'.⁵⁸ Moreover, their performance of American syncopated music was 'so typically American' that the band of 56 men and two officers - Captain Little and Lieutenant Europe - was then detached from the 15th Regiment to be sent to Aix-les-Bains, a French health resort and official rest centre for the Allied forces. Deployed thousands of miles away home, the

⁵⁴ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 11, p. 32

⁵⁵ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 11, p. 33

⁵⁶ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 11, p. 34

⁵⁷ Noble L. Sissle, *ibid*, p. 77. He recalls that the audience consisted of several thousand soldiers and citizens who 'applauded and cheered very vigorously'. See also Arthur W. Little, *ibid*, pp. 54-56

⁵⁸ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 12, pp. 3-4. Sissle, *ibid*, pp. 106-107, also notes how the French reacted to their peculiar performance of 'Marseillaise'. 'When the first note was struck the French sailors and soldiers standing around hardly seemed to recognize the strains of their National anthem... but suddenly, as the band had played eight or ten bars there came over their faces an astonished look... after we had been in France and had palyed our National hymn and the Marselliase on quite a few occasions, we found out that the military, inspired, rhythmic interpretation of the national hymns pleased the Frenchmen. In fact, it thrilled them to a far greater extent than their own bands playing.'

American Expeditionary Force needed a 'flavour of America' and the 'feel of home' for recreational purpose.⁵⁹ With radio (not to mention telephone) communication scarcely available, musical tunes performed by a military band were arguably the only audible media to convey that 'feel of home' to the soldiers abroad. As suggested in the first chapter, a military band is required to not only arouse the soldiers' morale but also soothe them when necessary - even more so in such a distant land. Europe and his band were considered as ideal to perform this function.⁶⁰ At Aix-les-Bains the band's daily concert excited the tired American soldiers to the extent that 'no other form of entertainment appealed to them quite so much'.⁶¹ The camp authority was so impressed by the band's contribution that it requested additional two weeks of band performance.

The band was particularly well received by the French. The band stopped at the city of Nantes before going to Aix-les-Bains. The concert at town's opera house on 12 February - Lincoln's Birthday - represents the French reaction to the unfamiliar numbers of ragtime and jazz.

'Then, it seemed, the whole audience began to sway, dignified French officers began to pat their feet along with the American general, who, temporarily, had lost his style and grace... The audience could stand it no longer; the 'Jazz germ' hit them, and it seemed to find the vital spot, loosening all muscles and causing what is known in America as an "Eagle Rocking Pit." "There now," I said to myself. "Colonel Hayward has brought his band over here and started ragtinitis in France; ain't this an awful thing to visit upon a nation with so many burdens?" But when the band had finished and the people were roaring with laughter, their faces wreathed in smiles, I was forced to say that this is just

⁵⁹ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 12, pp. 5-6

⁶⁰ See R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 12, pp. 6-7. After listening to the band's performance, General Walsh, along with his staff, was deeply moved and personally urged General Pershing, commander of the AEF, to send the band and its bandleader to Aix-les-Bains. It must also be emphasised that Europe was playing an essential part in directing the band. Captain Little notes, for instance, that Europe wrote 3 million notes for arranging the orchestration for each tunes; 'in Europe's band (sic) no more than two men ever played the same score. His arrangements were always marvels of effective harmony.' See Arthur W. Little, *ibid*, p. 133

⁶¹ Winthrop Ames, one of the organisers of the camp entertainment, describes how the US soldiers cheered to the performance. 'It excited those tired boys as I have rarely seen anybody of men excited. They climbed on tables and chairs; they waved caps and chocolate cups, they shouted; they demanded that it be played again and again, and again.' His letter to Sissile is reprinted in Sissile's *Memoir*, *ibid*, Chapter 16, p. 128

what France needs at this critical moment... All through France the same thing happened.’⁶²

Little also recalls, ‘All they (the French audience) seemed to want to know, that night, was that a great national holiday of their ally was being celebrated - and that made the celebration one of their own. The spirit of emotional enthusiasm had got into the blood of our men; and they played as I had never heard them play before.’⁶³ As demonstrated in this instance, the band music was a strong tool of trust-building and solidarity between the US and its allies.

Another major role Europe and his band performed was to spearhead the integration of the American force into the French. At the beginning of March, 1918, the 15th Infantry Regiment became the first US unit to be attached to the French Army. Upon the temporary assignment the regiment changed its name as the Trois Cent Soizante Neuvieme R. I. U. S., the 369th Infantry Regiment. The host unit, the 16th Division of the 4th French Army, was on the front line in Connantre and was holding their combat training near Givry-en-Argonne.⁶⁴ Despite a number of obstacles concerning the difference of organisation, equipment, and language, the French had no racial prejudice against the newly transferred black troops and officers. Europe made Sergeant Mikell take over his musical responsibilities and took charge of his original combat unit, Company I of the 3rd Battalion. He became the first African-American officer to lead troops into combat along with the French in World War I. He told Sissle in detail how he crossed ‘no-man’s land’ to raid the German lines with his French “‘ever-stick” friend’ on his side.⁶⁵ In addition, the 369th Regiment Band, now led by Bandmaster Mikell, continued to be called ‘Europe’s Band’ and served various duties behind the front line, including a increasing number of funeral services.⁶⁶ They also visited several small villages and gave concerts for the French soldiers. Sissle, who remained within

⁶² Noble L. Sissle, *ibid*, pp. 120-121

⁶³ Arthur W. Little, *ibid*, p. 128

⁶⁴ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 12, pp. 11-12

⁶⁵ His description is reprinted in Badger’s biography, *ibid*, Chapter 13, pp. 7-10. It is remarkable that Europe brought a small folding organ with him into the trench and worked to create new songs inspired by his combat experience, including ‘Everything Reminds Me of You’, which depicted the soldiers’ shared feeling of ‘being far away from home and yet being constantly reminded by numerous small things of their loved ones’. Unfortunately, however, most of these works were lost.

⁶⁶ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 13, p. 11

the band, recalls 'in that way there sprang up a great comradeship between our regiment and the French soldiers that formed our Division.'⁶⁷ The integration of the US unit into the French proved to be successful, both on the very front line and a little behind, and other regiments later followed the 369th, which by the middle of June earned the nickname 'Hellfighters'.⁶⁸

By the middle of August Europe returned to the band and they were stationed in Paris in order to undertake morale-boosting missions at the hospitals and rest camps.⁶⁹ 'As they had done the previous February at Aix-les Bains, Europe's band had again made an important contribution to the Allied war effort. Thousands of wounded soldiers - American, British, French, Belgian, and Italian - would testify to the benefit of their music.'⁷⁰ There in Paris the advantage of their peculiar music - jazz - became clear.⁷¹ French Army officials were reported to be 'exceedingly fond of "jazz" music furnished by the colored bands.'⁷² However, the 'jazz effect' was not limited to the black Americans or the French. Jazz represented 'personal, immediate, and kinetic' nature, as opposed to the European authoritative tradition of music, and therefore more strongly appealed to all the people involved in the 'dispersonalized mechanical warfare' characterised by industrial mass firepower - indeed, jazz meant humanness in the inhuman battlefield.⁷³ That appeal was strong

⁶⁷ Noble L. Sissle, *ibid*, p. 145

⁶⁸ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 13, p. 13

⁶⁹ Europe had served in the trenches for nearly five months before he was injured by German gas and evacuated from the front line in mid June.

⁷⁰ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 14, p. 5

⁷¹ The peculiarity of their music at the time was remarkable in one interesting episode during their stay in Paris. Europe recalls in 'A Negro Explains Jazz' in *Literary Digest* (26 April, 1919), pp. 28-29, reprinted in Eileen Southern, *Readings in Black American Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), p. 240, 'but the supreme moment came in the Tuileries Gardens when we gave a concert in conjunction with greatest bands in the world—the British Grenadiers' Band, the band of the Garde Republicain (sic), and the Royal Italian Band. My band, of course, could not compare with any of these, yet the crowd, and it was such a crowd as I never saw anywhere else in the world, deserted them for us. We played to 50,000 people, at least, and, had we wished it, we might be playing yet... After the concert was over, the leader of the band of the Garde Republicain came over and asked me for the score of one of the jazz compositions we had played. He said he wanted his band to play it. I gave it to him, and the next day he again came to see me. He explained that he couldn't seem to get the effects I got, and asked me to go to a rehearsal. I went with him. The great band played the composition superbly - but he was right; the jazz effects were missing. I took an instrument and showed him how it could be done, and he told me that his own musicians felt sure that my band had used special instruments. Indeed, some of them, afterward attending one of my rehearsals, did not believe what I had said until after they had examined the instruments used by my men.' Europe states jazz was not *what* the musicians played but, rather, *how* they played it.

⁷² 'Jazz Music Makes Hit with French Officials' in *New York Age* (5 October, 1918), p. 6

⁷³ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 14, p. 7

enough to fill postwar France full of jazz.⁷⁴ In this regard, thanks to their musical quality of jazz, Europe and his band played an indeed unique role in maintaining the mental conditions of soldiers and civilians alike and in filling the gap between the US and its allied forces in World War I. A number of bands, including the 807th Pioneer Infantry Band, were later modeled after the 'Hellfighters' Band.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Europe is often considered as the first to popularise jazz in Paris. See Jeffrey H. Jackson, 'Making Jazz French: The Reception of Jazz Music in Paris, 1927-1934' in *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2002), pp. 149-170. That jazz wave spread across Europe over the coming decades. See Lawrence Gushee, 'The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Jazz' in *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Selected Papers from the 1993 National Conference on Black Music Research (Spring, 1994), pp. 1-24.

It is interesting that, while the US military bands had been heavily influenced by the European music tradition from their very inception, the introduction of jazz by Europe's band in turn had tremendous influence on the European music scene. Joseph Hunt and Thomas J. Anderson point out this mutual influence in 'Blacks and the Classics' in *The Black Perspective in Music*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Autumn, 1973), pp. 157-165

⁷⁵ Susan C. Cook, 'Jazz as Deliverance: The Reception and Institution of American Jazz during the Weimar Republic' in *American Music* (Spring 1989), pp. 30-47, esp. p. 32

Conclusion

James Reese Europe, safely back on the US soil, was killed by one of his own bandsmen in Boston on May 9, 1919, at the age of 39.⁷⁶ The city of New York gave him a public funeral, and his body was buried 'with full military honors'.⁷⁷ A number of memorials were held and much was said to emphasise Europe's contribution to the development of ragtime and jazz. For instance, one New York Times article read:

'who think that contemporary ragtime, however imperfect, is a state in the evolution of a different sort of music which may eventually possess considerable merit will regret the untimely death of a man who ranked as one of the greatest ragtime conductors, perhaps the greatest, we have had. Ragtime may be negro music, but it is American negro music, more alive than much other American music; and Europe was one of the Americans who was contributing most to its development.'⁷⁸

Likewise, more recent scholarly works have put Europe in the context of jazz music history. As Europe's civilian career was much longer than that in the military - he served in the Army for less than three years, after all - it seems quite correct to evaluate him as such.

However, the history of the US military bands as another analytical framework reveals strategic aspects of Europe's contribution to the US war effort in World War I. While the US military bands through the nineteenth century mostly enhanced their own soldiers' morale, the nature of the Great War demanded more. Europe and the 369th Infantry Regiment Band utilised their unique sound of early jazz and fulfilled the wartime purposes. They first considerably boosted recruitment for their own newly formed 15th Infantry Regiment. In France, their music entertained not only the Americans who were homesick fighting in a distant country but also the French and other allied people, combatants and civilians alike, who were deeply weary of the inhuman nature of the war. In addition, they facilitated the integration of the US Expeditionary Force into the

⁷⁶ The event is detailed in Sissle's Memoirs, *ibid*, pp. 223-236. The news of his death was also widely covered in the media, including two Boston daily papers, *Boston Herald* and *Boston Globe*.

⁷⁷ R. Reid Badger, *ibid*, Chapter 16, pp. 4-9

⁷⁸ 'Topics of the Times: Loss of an American Musician' in New York Times (12 May, 1919), p. 12

French organisation. As part of the rediscovery of James Reese Europe, these cases demonstrate his contribution to the development of military bands is no less significant than that in the jazz history.

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