

Fife and Drum



The use of fife and drum corps in the military dates back many centuries. Because of its loud and piercing sound when played in its upper register, the fife, which is also easy to carry, used to be the preferred instrument to signal messages to infantry troops. According to some, a band of fife and drums can be heard up to 3 miles away.

Back in the day, each company in an infantry regiment was assigned two fifers and two drummers. When the battalion or regiment were formed up on parade or for movement en masse, these musicians would be detached from the companies to form a "band." This is how the word band became associated with a group of musicians.

We have at least two members of our family who served in the fife and drum corps. Michael Cain, born in 1750, served as a drum major during the war of 1812. As lore has it, during the Battle of New Orleans, he exclaimed, "Men are not killed with drums!" With that, he picked up a gun and joined the battle. He was wounded in the head. According to family stories, he was carried off the field on the horse of General Andrew Jackson.

His son, John C. Cain, was denied recruit during the War of 1812 due to a disability so he instead played for the troops in the training camps. But he did serve as a fife major during

the Mexican War.

Michael Cain and John C. Cain were, respectively, the 4th and 3rd great grandfathers of my sister-in-law.

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