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Research Materials/Source Documents  
STUDENT PAPERS

FILE TITLE: Background Paper on CMSgt (Ret) Floyd D. Werle

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Reviewed by:

AFEHRI Representative G. R. Akin date 29 DEC 97

EPC Representative [Signature] date 14 Jan 98

Scanner Operator [Signature] date 16 Jan 98

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19-8-71  
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**USAF Senior NCO Academy**

**Enlisted Historical Research Project**

**Chief Master Sergeant  
Floyd E. Werle**

Senior Master Sergeant Timothy D. Tyler  
Class 95-D: Student number 0413  
Concentrated Study Area 13

## BACKGROUND PAPER

ON

### CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT (RET) FLOYD E. WERLE

1. This background paper is an Enlisted Historical Research Project for Concentrated Study Area 13 at the Senior NCO Academy, Class 95-D. The paper will focus on some of the details of the life and Air Force career of Chief Master Sergeant (Ret) Floyd E. Werle. It will include a personal history, military career history, a plain language quantification of his duties, some facts and numbers, a brief discussion of Floyd's music, and an attempt to quantify the impact of this exceptional Chief Master Sergeant on the United States Air Force and the nation.

2. Floyd E. Werle was born on 8 May 1929, in Billings, Montana where he spent all his early years. He began the study of music by taking piano lessons at age five; then studied the clarinet at age seven. Ralph Rauh, a pupil of Guiseppi, was particularly noteworthy as a piano teacher. Floyd credits Mr. Rauh with being THE major influence on his piano playing ability. Mr. Rauh taught Floyd until he left for college. (13:--) Floyd rapidly progressed in his musical ability at the piano. He played for his church, his school, and for dance bands in the Billings area throughout high school. Floyd's high school band director, Stan Richards, was responsible for Floyd's college choice of the University of Michigan. Mr. Richards graduated from that school and encouraged Floyd to apply. It's interesting that in the time period of the late 40's and early 50's there was little formal instruction available to orchestration students. Floyd says, in fact, that he was "self-taught." He wrote many arrangements for his high school concert band and, "whatever little dance band I happened to be playing in at the time." (13:--) It was on the basis of these arrange-

ments that Stan Richards encouraged Floyd to pursue college-level instruction. At the University of Michigan, there was no formal program of instruction for music orchestration. Floyd attended that school as a “music theory” major. He gained more experience in arranging and orchestration by doing a lot of work for the University of Michigan Concert Band. Dr. William Revelli, a world-class conductor, was Floyd’s “dear friend and mentor.” Dr. Revelli was the head of the entire music department at the University of Michigan. In addition to the arranging, Floyd played tuba and many piano solos in the University of Michigan Concert Band. In his late sophomore, and entire junior year, he scored the football half-time shows for the Marching Band. Floyd describes himself as “a brash kid from the country.” He tells the story of his arrival at the University of Michigan like this. “When I arrived, I went to Dr. Revelli’s office and asked if I could join the band. Dr. Revelli replied by asking, ‘What instrument do you play?’ I said, ‘What instrument do you need?’” (13:--). Floyd was a master performer on many instruments. He enjoyed tremendous success at the University of Michigan, where his musical genius was just beginning to flower. It’s important to note that Floyd is a devout Christian and credits whatever talent he has to divine intervention. As you’ll see, divine intervention may very well have played a role in the massive accomplishments of this musical genius.

3. In the summer of 1950, Floyd returned home to Billings to work. The goal was to make enough money to return to college in the fall. That summer, the Korean conflict started. The director of the Billings, Montana municipal band also happened to be the head of the local draft board. Floyd’s musical association with this man proved to be beneficial. The band director knew that Floyd’s draft number was about to “come up,” so he told Floyd about an opportunity for “direct enlistment” in an Air Force band. Floyd discovered the 695th Air Force band at what

is now Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, Montana. Floyd auditioned on tuba. The band leader was so happy to have Floyd he was enlisted "on the spot," and given "basic training" right at Malmstrom Air Force Base. Floyd characterizes his ten months at Malmstrom as "relatively happy." It was six months before he received his first set of "blues." The winter was particularly harsh, which made "the real World War II tar paper shacks and pot-bellied stoves" very memorable. (13:--)

While Floyd toughed out his first winter in the Air Force, preparations were under way for the American Bandmasters Association annual convention. In the summer of 1951, the convention was held in Washington, DC. Dr. Revelli, Floyd's college mentor, was a prominent figure in the association. Plans were made for the Washington area service bands to perform at the convention. Dr. Revelli, invited to conduct the Air Force Band, chose "Music from South Pacific," one of Floyd's college arrangements, to play with the band. Colonel George S. Howard (the first commander of The United States Air Force Band) was so impressed with Floyd's arrangement, he asked Dr. Revelli about Floyd. Of course, since Floyd was already in the Air Force, it was a simple matter for Colonel Howard to "snag" him away from the band at Malmstrom. That's exactly what he did. In July of 1951, Floyd made the trip from Malmstrom to Washington in his "old Studebaker." (13:--)

In less than two years, Floyd was appointed the Chief Arranger of the United States Air Force Band. (9:--)

By 1965, Floyd was selected and promoted to Chief Master Sergeant. (11:--)

That's the story of how Floyd joined the Air Force and the premier Air Force band.

4. A discussion of Floyd's accomplishments as Chief Arranger in the band would be meaningless without first establishing a core of understanding about his duties. A band arranger functions on the same level as an aircraft design engineer. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force, in cooperation

with elected and appointed officials and his contemporaries from the other services, determines the mission of component units in the Air Force. Once a broad mission is defined, hardware is conceived, designed, tested, perfected, and put into operation. To the point, let's say a particular airplane is designed and built to accomplish a specific mission. Likewise, band commanders determine what music will work for particular audiences. If the piece of music already exists, someone must still design, test, perfect, and put into operation a vehicle that can be used by the commander and the musicians. That's the job of the arranger. Unlike the aircraft design engineer who merely designs, the band arranger conceives, designs, builds, tests, perfects, and puts into operation the vehicle. While the band commander is the ultimate pilot, the arranger must be able to "fly the plane" too! (2:--)

Here's a more "down to earth" example. The band is scheduled to perform a concert in Atlanta, Georgia. Most people have heard the Ray Charles version of the song "Georgia." This song would be a logical choice to play at a concert in Georgia, right? For the sake of this discourse, let's assume that no published music exists with the right number of instruments for the song "Georgia." The band arranger goes into action and makes a special arrangement of the song for the band to play at the concert in Atlanta, Georgia. (2:--; 1:--; 12:--) It sounds easy, right? Think about this. Is Ray Charles going to sing the song at the concert? No. Who will be the vocalist? Will it be a man or a woman? (The answer to that question will determine how "high" or "low" the "plane" needs to fly.) Does the commander want a fast or slow version? Does he want it loud or soft? How long should it be? All of these questions (and more) must be answered for the arrangement to be successful. Floyd was an expert at innately answering these questions. Floyd's genius and love of the art of music also enabled him to be acutely aware of strengths and weaknesses in individual musician capabilities within the band. (1:--; 2:--;

9:--; 12:--) He used this knowledge to “custom design” all of his arrangements for the band. This skill is equivalent to the aircraft design engineer custom tailoring every cockpit in every plane to differences in pilot size. Imagine the enhanced potential of a plane with a cockpit custom designed around the pilot’s individual body structure. That’s the big picture. Now let’s talk numbers.

5. The music library of the Air Force Band currently contains over 500 compositions, transcriptions, orchestrations, and arrangements written by Floyd Werle. (11:--) That’s very close to 17 arrangements per year. Said another way, Floyd wrote about 1.5 arrangements per month. That doesn’t sound like very much; but it is an incredible body of work. It’s time for another analogy. Floyd was an expert at composing music selections with narration tailored to a specific theme. For instance, he composed a work called “An Air Force Panorama.” (13:--) The composition contains individual music parts for over 100 musicians and takes 25 minutes to perform. The narration is based on the history of songs sung by fighter pilots over the years from World War II through 1971, and was meticulously researched and written by Floyd. (9:--) All music is divided into “measures.” For the purpose of the analogy, let’s use the computer spreadsheet model with which most of us are familiar. A musical “measure” is the same thing as a column in a computer spreadsheet. “Columns” go across the page. This particular composition contains over 600 “columns.” The rows in the spreadsheet (which go down the page) represent individual musicians. There are over 40 individual music parts performed by 100 musicians. We have a “spreadsheet” that is 600 columns wide by 40 rows deep. Multiplying the columns by the rows, we find 24,000 individual measures, or “cells.” There is no limit, in music, to the amount of information a composer can put in a measure. For the sake of simplicity, let’s say each “cell” in our

spreadsheet contains only 2 pieces of information, or “notes.” That’s a conservative estimate for one of Floyd’s massive compositions. As you can see, we’re up to 48,000 notes. Let’s arbitrarily cut that figure by 75% and work out the math for Floyd’s entire career. Remember, each arrangement has the potential for 48,000 notes, but we’re using 12,000 as an arbitrary number. I’ll save you the trouble of reading the math. In Floyd’s entire Air Force career, he wrote 6.9 million notes. That’s a conservative estimate. In 11,680 days available in Floyd’s 32 year career, if he never took a day off, he wrote 600 notes per day! During Floyd’s career, there were no machines for music scoring. All that he did was by hand. That takes care of the quantity. Now let’s look at some especially noteworthy compositions.

6. Let’s face it. A piece of paper with words on it will never come close to conveying the emotional power of live musicians performing a composition. With that in mind, what follows is a discussion of some of Floyd’s most popular (and best) works. “The Genius of Harry Who?” is an example of Floyd’s encyclopedic knowledge of popular music. (12:--)

The arrangement consists of tunes that everyone knows and loves, but no one knows the name of the composer. Floyd gets the audience involved with the band by building a beautiful orchestration of known and loved songs, then piques the audience interest by challenging them to think about the composer. Here are some of the songs in the medley: “You’ll Never Know Just How Much I Love You,” “Jeepers Creepers,” and “I’ve Got A Gal in Kalamazoo.” On the serious side, Floyd composed a beautiful song called, “The Story of the Battle Hymn of the Republic.” (12:--)

Floyd researched the evolution of the song and put an inspiring narrative with an orchestration that builds in suspense and musical intensity. The performance of the song, with the well-known melody and lyrics, always results in a thunderous standing ovation for the performers. (12:--)

The arrangement

was selected for nation-wide broadcast during televised coverage from the Air and Space Museum of President Ronald Reagan's second inauguration festivities. (12:--) Floyd was well known at the national level of the entertainment community. As a direct result of Floyd's exceptional ability, well-known stars like Doc Severinsen, William Conrad, and Walter Cronkite were eager to participate in performances by The Air Force Band. (1:--; 2:--; 9:--) In 1975, Floyd composed a narrative and arrangement based on the words of Thomas Jefferson called, "We Hold These Truths." The work was premiered at a performance by The Air Force Band in preparation for the nation's bi-centennial celebration at Constitution Hall. Walter Cronkite served as the narrator and commented that the performance of Floyd's music arrangement and narration was one of the most "moving things he'd ever spoken." (9:--) Once again, Floyd's music served to get the audience on its feet and created a sense of pride and patriotism. (3:11) All the success of Floyd's work began with a spark of an idea. Let's examine the impact of those ideas.

7. Every good and noble thing man has done for himself began with an idea. Floyd, without shame, would credit his Maker and Savior for any success he's had. Any study of the past of our great land will reveal the deep religious conviction held by prominent history-makers that guided the difficult decisions they had to make. So it is fair to say that Floyd, while serving the nation and like the great men and women from the past, served his Master first. In determining Floyd's impact on the Air Force, a cursory glance at the period of his service reveals a country in turmoil. The Air Force was three years old when Floyd enlisted. The Korean Conflict raged, then the Vietnam Conflict tore at the fabric of our land. Then came the "hollow force" of the Carter years, and the beginning of the Reagan buildup. In the middle of all the controversies of those turbulent times, there raged a battle of ideas. Floyd, like most of his countrymen and Air Force partners,

believed in the inherent good of America. While the good and earnest men and women in high government office worried about the safety of America, and rightfully plotted a noble course for the Air Force, Floyd was a principal warrior in communicating to the American people the simple virtue in the battle of ideas. Music is the language of the heart and soul. Well done, it can communicate without the language boundaries of syntax or the limitations of social convention. Floyd's divinely inspired writing, in combination with the band commanders and enlisted bandmen, made time stand still, made people cry, made people laugh, warmed their souls, helped them forget their pain, helped them remember their joy, and best expressed all that is good (at a critical time) about our great nation. Serving in the middle of a great storm, Floyd's work was a beacon of light. He captured the spirit of true Americans who can't understand the fanaticism of a kamikaze pilot, the horror of an Adolph Hitler, the ability to torture to death a nineteen-year-old boy in the steaming jungles of North Vietnam, nor comprehend the senseless violence of 900 year old religious conflict. Floyd set to music the idea that it was noble to spend millions of dollars on an ejection seat to save the life of just one Air Force pilot. The performance and hearing of Floyd's music allowed Presidents, Generals, Airman, and just plain citizens to pause long enough to be invigorated by direct contact with their souls of something that was wholly wonderful. It's no stretch at all to believe that God had His hand in the music of Chief Master Sergeant Floyd E. Werle.

8. This background paper focused on some of the details of the life and military career of Chief Master Sergeant (Ret) Floyd E. Werle. Included were a brief personal history, a summation of his enlisted history, an objective description of his arranging duties with the United States Air Force

Band, some facts and extrapolated numbers, comments on some noteworthy compositions, and finally an attempt at quantifying the impact of his music on the Air Force and the nation.

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A note from the author:

No paper like this can ever come close to describing the massive achievements of Chief Werle. As an inducement to someone with better writing skills and more time, I would say there's enough material available on this man to write a book. Certainly those who've performed or heard the Chief's work can attest to the singular greatness of the man and would further attest that the modern greatness of the United States Air Force and the nation is best expressed in his work. I feel, as a child of the sixties and early seventies, that our Air Force and nation are in critical need of a person with Chief Werle's skill. The "battle of ideas" nomenclature is a valid means of expressing to the public (our public) the need for virtue, integrity, and self-sacrifice in the face of the moral decay prevalent in our nation today. I offer my sincere and most humble thanks to Chief Werle for talking with me, for writing his music, for his selfless service to the Air Force, and for his belief in God.

Tim Tyler