



A Brief History of the U.S. Naval Forces Europe Band

United States Navy Musicians have a long and diverse history in Europe. Since the early 1950's they have been telling the Navy story and serving in this culturally rich region as goodwill ambassadors of the United States. The current composition of the U.S. Naval Forces Europe Band traces back to two separate U.S. Navy Bands in the Naples region; the former Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe (CINCSOUTH) Band and the Commander, U.S. SIXTH Fleet Band. For over fifty years, both bands operated out of Naples, Italy until a realignment of commands and leadership dictated a more efficient structure and use of the Navy Bands in the area.

The CINCSOUTH Band (NATO Band)

The CINCSOUTH Band's history began in London, England in the 1950s when a small contingent of Navy Musicians was established to support the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean (CINCNELM), a four-star command. In 1951 Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean assumed the additional duty as Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe (CINCSOUTH) and relocated to Bagnoli, Italy with his group of Navy Musicians. This relocation established the first permanently stationed Navy Musicians in Naples, Italy and ultimately the CINCSOUTH Band. In 1974, to better reflect the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance, the CINCSOUTH Band was expanded to include military musicians from Greece, Italy, Turkey, as well as musicians from the United States Army and United States Air Force. In 1997, musicians from the United States Marine Corps were added and in 2002, musicians from the British Royal Marines became a part of this unique multi-national and multi-service unit. In 2004, the Allied Forces Southern Europe command was re-designated as Allied Joint Force Command Naples. As a result, the band's name changed from CINCSOUTH Band to Allied Forces Band Naples.

The SIXTH Fleet Band

In February 1950, the United States Navy established its SIXTH Fleet. Up until 1958, the SIXTH Fleet flagship changed annually and carried unit bands onboard from Norfolk, Virginia. In the Spring of 1958 the USS Des Moines (CA-134), with Navy Unit Band #190 onboard, established its home port in Villefranche-sur-Mer, France, thus creating the first permanent SIXTH Fleet musicians. For the next nine years the band would call Villefranche-sur-Mer home serving onboard the SIXTH Fleet flagships USS Des Moines and USS Springfield. With France's withdrawal from the NATO military command structure in 1967, the SIXTH Fleet flagship changed homeports to its current location in Gaeta, Italy. The SIXTH Fleet Band continued to serve onboard SIXTH Fleet flagships until the late 1970s, when the band was moved into a converted quonset hut in Capodichino, Italy.

Changes to Command Hierarchy

The CINCSOUTH and SIXTH Fleet Bands were assigned to four and three star commanders respectively. As the U.S. military structure in Europe changed through the years, so did the leadership roles of the four and three star commanders to which the CINCSOUTH and SIXTH Fleet Bands were assigned. In early 2000, plans were made to relocate the headquarters of Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces Europe from London, England to Naples, Italy. In 2002 the four star commander became Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe. On 15 March 2004, NATO's Allied Joint Force Command Naples was activated and its predecessor command, Allied Forces Southern Europe was deactivated. With these changes, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe continued to be "dual-hatted" as Commander, Allied Joint Force Command Naples. In 2004, the U.S. SIXTH Fleet was merged into the staff of Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe. The two bands now essentially worked under the same staff. As a result, a restructuring of the bands was initiated.

Modern Day Structure

In May of 2006, Admiral Harry G. Ulrich III, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe; Commander Allied Joint Force Command Naples requested to combine the Allied Forces Band Naples and SIXTH Fleet Band to create one band that would be called Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe Band. This request was approved in July 2006 and both bands were combined to create a major command band with 58 U.S. Navy enlisted musicians and two officers. This reallocation of U.S. Navy musicians allowed for more direct support to NATO and the Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe; Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Africa; and Commander, Allied Joint Force Command Naples mission. As a result of a restructuring of the Navy Music Program in 2012, the band was reduced to its current level of 50 U.S. Navy enlisted musicians and two officers. NATO allied partner musicians currently assigned to U.S. Naval Forces Europe Band include Italian military musicians from the Italian Air Force, Army, Carabinieri, and Navy. The band provides support for official military and community relations events throughout the region. The U.S. Naval Forces Europe Band currently resides at Naval Support Activity Naples in Capodichino, Italy.

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