

THE BEST BAND IN THE LAND
SALUTES
COLONEL D. KEITH FELTHAM

Dear Band Alumni,

Three months have now passed since the Testimonial Dinner which the Band Alumni held for the Colonel and Mrs. Feltham.

The Testimonial Committee felt that the guests of the dinner and other contributors to the Testimonial Fund would find an excellent memento of the evening in the form of a written copy of the statements of General Medenbach and Colonel Leister together with the remarks of Colonel Feltham.

We know that the evening will be one which Colonel Feltham will long remember and now, with the assistance of this final report, it is hoped that all will be able to share some of the pleasure and emotion of that evening, November 22, 1975.

"The remarks of Major General Milton H. Medenbach, Superintendent Emeritus, in response to the request of the testimonial committee:"

Ladies and Gentlemen: I was delighted when Major Youngs asked me several days ago to speak to you this evening and I accepted at once since it would give me the opportunity to tell you what is in my own heart and to be presumptuous enough to speak for many hundreds of young men who have been members of the Valley Forge Band over the past 27 years.

I have spoken to many groups, both here and abroad, during my forty-four years at Valley Forge, but I must say that the invitation to be the speaker on this occasion gave me the greatest pleasure of all - for here was the opportunity to publicly pay tribute to a valued colleague and a friend!

We have come together this evening to honor a man whose impact on the Valley Forge Military Academy has been remarkable and I remember so clearly how he came about! In 1949 the Cadet Band was in a moribund state due to a succession of Bandmasters, following Ferd Lhotak's sudden and untimely death in 1947. The condition of the Band was particularly unfortunate since Ferd Lhotak had labored long and hard in constructing a professional band out of a gaggle of youthful musicians during his 11 years as Bandmaster. The two years following Ferd Lhotak's death proved the need for a leader, who was not only a gifted musician but also a man of force and character if the tradition of an outstanding military band, which could also function as a concert band, in the Valley Forge tradition, was to be preserved and expanded. In true Valley Forge fashion, the Superintendent had a solution. Having been an admirer of the style, discipline, pride, musicianship, and professional leadership of the British Regimental Bands, our Founder took off for the British Isles. He was convinced, in his usual far-seeing mind, that only there could be found the type of Bandmaster, who would fit the standards and needs of Valley Forge. He made known his specifications to his several friends in the War Office in London and was told that, of course, there were many outstanding Bandmasters in the British Army and to prove it they said they would assemble the very best from all over the Kingdom so that our Superintendent could personally see them, hear them, and then personally select the best of the very best! The War Office was as good as its word and in due course British Bandmasters were assembled at Kneller Hall, the British Army School of Music. Here, on a summer's evening, in the garden of Kneller Hall, the combined bands of the Royal Military

School of Music presented a Grand Concert, as they were called, with several conductors, before a large audience. When a trim, young, smart-looking Bandmaster stepped on the podium and led the musicians in Friedmann's Slavonic Rhapsody # 2, it was not long after his first graceful movements and disciplined professional approach in his conducting that our Superintendent and Mrs. Baker turned simultaneously, to each other and exclaimed, "There's our Man!" And so it was! Of such stuff is history made and hostage given to the future. I remember so well General Baker's enthusiastic report over the transatlantic telephone of his incredible good fortune in finding a Bandmaster and his glowing description of the man himself!

In due course, D. Keith Feltham arrived at the Forge, together with wife and young son to take up his duties for the academic year 1949-50. I do not know how many Band alumni of that year are here tonight, but I am sure their memories will affirm that the new-British Bandmaster was like a breath of fresh air in a crowded room, and the inspiration of his talent and personality acted as an electric compulsion of every member of that Cadet Band!

That was the beginning! And from this point the Band steadily increased in stature and musicianship under the deft hand of Keith Feltham. Of course, the Bandsmen knew the reason at once and it did not take long for the Faculty and Corps of Cadets to realize that the Band had embarked on a program which would quickly achieve a tradition of such excellence as to present a challenge to all the Bandmasters of the future. This excellence which the Cadet Band has personified during the entire span of Keith Feltham's direction, is a very special and unique thing. I have always felt that Keith Feltham's conception of the meaning of excellence was as the ancient Greeks understood it - they associated excellence with a quality of life, rather than things. Their excellence involved virtue and was a moral affair, giving status to superiority rather than giving superiority to status. The difference is profound!

I am convinced that this wise comprehension of an eternal - if somewhat elusive - truth was Keith Feltham's secret weapon! I am sure that many of his astute Bandsmen subconsciously learned this valuable lesson. That the concept was understood is borne out by the fact that, since 1950, the Cadet Band has not only constantly excelled musically, but it has excelled academically and tactically as well!

Fortunate, indeed, were the young men who came under Keith Feltham's tutelage, for, in him, they found not only a gifted musician but a man with an extraordinary sense of fitness, a very positive set of personal standards, a passion for excellence, a refreshingly direct approach, an undeviating sense of right and wrong, a ready ear, an abundance of compassion, and, thank God, a well-developed sense of humor! He has the ability to pass on these attributes and, if there be a young man who has failed to benefit in some way from the mere association with Keith Feltham - he is an insensate clod, indeed! In my travels about the world, I have yet to meet an ex-cadet bandsman who does not pay tribute to Keith Feltham, as a contributor to his personal success. In my own experience, as Commandant of Cadets for almost the entire period of Colonel Feltham's service at Valley Forge, I speak with some authority when I say that in the achievement of standards and the maintenance of the brilliance which exemplified Valley Forge, in General Baker's image, the Cadet Band was always in the vanguard. I am sure their Bandmaster rejoices in the carry-over of this enthusiasm and esprit de corps into the businesses and professions of his alumni for I am aware of his equal pride in the success of a bandsman of 25 years ago and the achievement of a Gold Star by a bandsman of 1975! This, the records will show in general and this demonstration of affection and respect tonight further proves my point that this man always played in tune!

The full contributions of Keith Feltham to Valley Forge - your Alma Mater - are beyond my ability to sketch. The adornment of our parades and ceremonies by his Cadet Marching Band; the sonority, musical discipline and perfection of the concerts by his concert band; the representation of the "excellence" of Valley Forge by his Fanfare Group, in and about Philadelphia; the precision of his Cadet Band at the great horseshows over many years; the dignity of his Cadet Band at a Presidential command performance at the White House and at inaugurations; the punctiliousness and precision of his concert band with the incomparable Philadelphia Orchestra; the many recordings by his Band which permit us to enjoy, again and again, the sounds of our band - are all well-known to you for you accomplished all of them under

Keith Feltham's baton or sensitive and expressive hands! However, as important as these contributions are—from my personal observation of 27 years – I suggest that there is an additional, very simple – but supreme – contribution to the Valley Forge family and that is, the Feltham personality that invariably makes all who come into contact with him, a better person for it!

And so, inexorably, we come full-term and, on Keith Feltham's retirement from the Forge, it is time to express appreciation for the magnificent job he and his Cadet Band have done for Valley Forge over a period of 27 years. In addition to his musical achievements, he has been a solid rock in the maintenance of the traditions of excellence and personal fitness which have been a hallmark at the Forge and no one knows this better than I do. For this we are all – cadets, faculty, staff, alumni and patrons – abundantly grateful. We also express appreciation to his fine family, who gave him loving support over the years and who, themselves, brought great credit to Valley Forge.

And, finally, we are grateful to Keith Feltham for having taught us, over the years, the truth of William Shakespeare's trenchant passage in the Merchant of Venice:

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is only fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night
And his affections dark as Erebus:

Let no such man be trusted:

And now, I ask you to charge your glasses, rise, and join with me in a toast: To Keith and Sydney, we wish you continued love, health, happiness, a long life, and much joy – and – as the song goes – "More, we cannot wish you!"

Lt. Col. Richard W. Leister, Band Captain in the 1951 Band made the presentation of his letter to Col. Feltham. The committee wished to reproduce this letter, in as much as it represented for us many of our own feelings about the Colonel.

Dear Keith:

An old adage much quoted by aviators concerning their hours aloft states, "Flying is hours and hours of boredom, interrupted by moments of stark terror." Life in general produces a similar thought for me. "Man lives his life year by year which is occasionally seriously influenced by few other men." Needless to say, the first major influence are his parents and home environment. Although, this part of life is crucial, it is my belief that the next step is the key factor in the maturing process which will determine the future direction of a man's life.

For hundreds of young men over the last twenty-seven years you have been the single individual who has provided each one of us with more direction and guidance than we will receive at any time in our future. You have been one of those few serious influences in our lives.

Gather a group of bandmen together after a period of separation and the conversation is always the same. Preliminary conversation will be centered around who is where, doing what, with how many kids; however, before too long the subject is always "The Duke." From then on it seems to be a contest to determine who in the group can remember the most concerning his experiences with "The Duke." Incidentally, the guy who gave you the name was Art Cutcliff, '49. My bag of reminiscences discloses the fact that the first piece of music you conducted at a band rehearsal in Lhotak Hall in September 1949 was "March Slav." It may be a fitting number for your last concert at Valley Forge. I shall never forget your incredibly stunned reaction when you learned that Art Metcalf on an eighty-seven cent bet, had jogged around the parade field in eight inches of snow after having had a few snorts of Mennens Skin Bracer. And Keith, do you remember the first time the band recorded on a disk at Hershey, Pennsylvania, the night of March 27, 1950? You cued Bob Kern on solo base clarinet to begin the number and nothing

happened. He was frozen with fear , and you were cool as a cucumber. I still listen to that record and chuckle.

I could go on and on Keith, because as you know I have four years of personal experiences recorded in diaries from my Valley Forge days. The point here is that you provided a refreshing point of view concerning discipline, honor, integrity, responsibility, and always dealt with cadets in a fair and impartial manner which was a major influence on each and every bandsman who passed through The Forge for twenty-seven years. Some of that influence is no doubt being exercised today on many children of band alumni. If I had to name one individual excluding my Father, who did the most to shape my life, it would have to be you. I want to take this opportunity to thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have earned the highest praise from Valley Forge and its graduates.

As you may remember at our table, my children always ended their grace with, "God Bless the Band." Our thoughts, prayers will always be with you, and in closing this letter, my final thought is, "May God Bless Keith Feltham."

Richard W. Leister
Captain, Band 1951

"When you can do the common things of life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world."

Col. Feltham's closing remarks require no introduction.

THE "DUKE'S" COMPANY MEETING AT THE VALLEY FORGE HILTON HOTEL
In Reply to General Medenbach

Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow Bandsmen and friends. Thank you all for honoring us with your presence here tonight. It is wonderful to see so many old friends and unbelievable that so many of you have come from such a distance to be here for the festivities. Cody Wyoming? Jim, you must have been awfully hungry!!

Someone once asked me for a definition of syncopation and in a facetious moment I said, "Syncopation is uneven movement from bar to bar." Perhaps it could be described too as "misplacement of the accent," and it seems to me that this is what is happening here tonight. The accent should be on the band, not on the bandmaster. Has it ever occurred to you how ridiculous a bandmaster would look if in making all those gyrations he did not have a band in front of him? They'd lock him up!!

General Medenbach has spoken of the events leading up to my arrival at Valley Forge Military Academy and of the events subsequent to my arrival.

If you will bear with me for a moment or two I should like to focus on a few days sandwiched in between those two periods General Medenbach spoke about.

My family and I arrived in New York on September 1st 1949. We were met by General Baker's Adjutant and Aide, who presented me with two things. A hundred dollars and a brand new band Captain. Bob Carson was his name and he is sitting right here tonight. Bob was one of that rare breed, a Plebe Captain, and you all know what problems are in store under those circumstances.

But this poor fellow had problems the like of which no cadet captain had ever encountered before.

One, he had a new Tactical Officer, two, he had a new Bandmaster ; three, the Bandmaster and Tactical Officer were one and the same person, and four, to put the "kibosh" on the whole thing, the fellow was a foreigner. He didn't even speak the language!!

Musically he didn't know the difference between a half note and a quarter note and tactically he had never heard of D.D.T.S.O. or N.O.D. or that lovely phrase "Lint on Trou." For the benefit of the ladies, "Lint on Trou" just means Dusty Pants!

Obviously then, the Band was in deep trouble, and when the Band gets into trouble it always does one thing. It holds a meeting!

Plebes downstairs, old men upstairs -- in the latrine! I've never quite figured out the significance of that location.

This time, however, the situation was so desperate that it was decided to hold a combined meeting. Old men and plebes - together - talking to one another!!

It was held in "The Back Room." For the benefit of those of you who did not know the old band barracks, this was a long, narrow room which was used for various purposes. It was used, for example, to store the Bands' overcoats, to point out to the plebes in a quiet and friendly manner the error of their ways, to store "weights", and Cutcliff's motorcycle, in parts, unknown to me - he thought!

I never did discover what went on at that meeting, but I suspect it was unanimously agreed that they would let me believe that I was running the show - that the tail was "wagging the dog." Whatever it was it seemed to work pretty well for the past 27 years. Adn may it continue to work as well for the next 27.

And now, just before I sit down, I want to let you in to a little secret. Sydney, my wife, has always alluded to the Bandsmen as "Our Boys." Seeing cadets walking in Wayne she would turn to me and say, "Those are our boys," or "Those are not our boys." When I asked her how she could tell she would always say "Our boys are better looking," or give some equally illogical reason. Strangely enough she was nearly always right. When I get home tonight, she's going to ask me what I meant by nearly always right, and she's going to tell me she was always right. And you know what? I'm not going to argue!

And now in conclusion I'm going to ask her to join me in a toast to:

The Band
Our Boys
The Pride of the Corps, and
The Salt of the Earth.

The testimonial committee would like to thank all those bandsmen who have assisted in the tribute to "The Duke." A great Band . . . and a great man . . . Valley Forge has indeed been fortunate!