

RCMP COMMUNITY BANDS: PIPES & DRUMS
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

A Position Paper to address the advent of RCMP community-based initiatives to form bands of 'Pipes and Drums'.

This paper is offered in light of the Clothing and Equipment Design Committee's (CEDC) decision of February 25, 1998, to support recommendations for a unique RCMP tartan and (3) kilted orders of dress for members of the RCMP. Further, this paper is intended to address a related RCMP 125th Anniversary initiative to parade an RCMP band of pipes and drums at the Nova Scotia Tattoo in June/July, 1998.

At time of writing, the RCMP contingent which will represent the Force is drawn largely from an existing RCMP community band in K Division, augmented by members from other divisions. The composite band which will represent the Force is comprised of regular members and civilians. This is due, in large measure, to the K Division group which was formed under the direction of the Commanding Officer of K Division as a 'Canada 125' initiative in 1992. The K Division band has been parading since that time, as a community-based policing initiative, wearing a modified red serge tunic and order of dress similar to that described as the new kilted 'review' order of dress.

The recommendations supported by the CEDC address the adoption of a tartan and modified orders of dress for regular members of the RCMP. While the submission to the CEDC does not specifically contemplate the formation of RCMP bands including civilians, the precedent set by the existence of the K Division band, combined with the pending Nova Scotia Tattoo, offers a timely opportunity to address several important questions associated with the customs and practices of police bands of pipes and drums.

Q. Is there a precedent for police bands of pipes and drums comprised, in part, of civilians?

A. Almost exclusively, large metropolitan and deployed regional police agencies in the Commonwealth and North America have bands of pipes and drums. With two notable exceptions, bands formed by police agencies are volunteer organizations comprised, at least in part, of civilians. The Strathclyde Police of Scotland have a 'professional' band of musicians hired for the expressed purpose of competing internationally. The OPP, during the 1980s, had a band comprised of serving members that were given duty-related concessions to travel and represent the Force: it was discontinued in the early 1990s due budget reductions and the requirement to dedicate uniform officers to operational duties. The group disbanded and has since been re-formed as a volunteer (mostly) citizen band.

Q. Should the RCMP support the formation of bands of pipes and drums?

A. The RCMP engages in a variety of community-based volunteer activities, individually and in groups. The popular attraction of pipe bands is simply the ‘common language of music’ along with the sense of pageantry and spectacle they provide to civic and ceremonial occasions. Progressive police services look for opportunities to interact with their public in positive and significant ways, removed from the routine of enforcement and regulatory duties. Again, music has a powerful appeal to young and old alike and police bands (regardless of genre) provide a unique and valuable opportunity to bring the police closer to those they serve.

Q. Should civilians be given the opportunity to participate in such bands?

A. It is more appropriate to ask whether police bands can exist without civilian participation. It has been demonstrated repeatedly, both within the military and police, that volunteer bands comprised only of ‘service personnel’ do not endure, nor do they perform particularly well. If the first criteria of participation is membership in the service, then quality of music is effected accordingly. Further, it is very rare that a police or military corps can reach and sustain a ‘critical threshold’ of membership sufficient to carry the group over the long term. What is important to achieve in a musical group, representative of their organization (by the uniform they wear), is quality of sound and availability in numbers. More often than not, civilians bring with them years of practice and skill in their music, respect for and willingness to represent their police, and motivation to participate in community activities. Civilian participation gives meaning to community partnership: the hallmark of community policing.

Q. Should civilians be afforded the opportunity to wear a kilted RCMP uniform?

A. This has been a critical question for both police and military to address. There is now almost 40 years of precedent in Canada, supporting the practice of civilians attired in kilted uniform. In the early 1960's, the Air Force, through the adoption of ‘Air Command (Base) Pipe Bands’ reconciled the modification of significant uniform, to accommodate the kilt. Pipe Band uniforms were accepted as distinct and separate from ‘significant’ dress. It was much easier to reconcile the participation of civilians, once it was accepted that Pipe Band uniforms were distinct and separate from regular service orders of dress. Likewise with police services. It is widely accepted that the Pipe Band uniform is separate and distinct for the regular uniform attire. Police bands frequently add to or modify shoulder badges of the tunic and/or the hat badge to signify ‘pipe band’ members.

The issue at hand for the RCMP is not so much the idea of civilians wearing a kilted uniform, but wearing the red serge itself. This is, admittedly, an

emotionally charged and sensitive issue. It should be born in mind that the kilted uniform is not the Force's "significant uniform". The colour of the tunic alone is representative of the Force. The wearing of significant uniform, comprised of 'boots, breeches, stetson and red serge' is not effected by this proposition.

At one time, the RCMP hired professional musicians, employed them as 'special constables' and dressed them in red serge to represent the Force. The principle and the merit of employing competent musicians and the use music as a device to bring police closer to the public is well understood. So too is voluntarism. There is no conflict.

If consensus cannot be reached on the issue of red serge, consideration may be given to community bands attired in 'Service Order No. 2', ie blue jacket, shirt and tie.

Q. If civilians participate in RCMP community bands, do they necessarily have to wear the same uniform?

A. Not necessarily. But there is no precedent for varying orders of dress within a band to differentiate between 'status' of members - allowing for the current practice of the RCMP "K" Division band which has altered the collar of the red serge (adding dark blue lapels, worn with white shirt and tie). This is most out of the ordinary and arguably inappropriate. Altering uniform to differentiate between serving members and 'others' runs counter to basic principles of teammanship, it is potentially divisive, and works squarely against the principle of partnership and democratic participation in voluntary small group activity.

Alternatives.

With the recent CEDC decision to ratify the tartan and kilted orders of dress, there are essentially three alternatives to consider, i.e.

1. that the RCMP discontinue the practice of RCMP community bands;

This would require that notice be served on the Edmonton RCMP Community Pipe Band and the newly-forming Sherwood Park RCMP Band that their presence and continuation is inappropriate and not sanctioned. Further, the RCMP just acquired a regional police service in and around Moncton NB, complete with an existing police community pipe band.

For many years RCMP members, pipers and drummers, have worn the uniforms of other community groups and police agencies. This has been

an unfortunate and chronic 'lost opportunity' for the RCMP. So too would be the loss of those small groups who are just beginning to give meaning to 'community policing' under the aegis of the RCMP.

2. that the RCMP permit the formation of community bands, comprised only of regular members;

As noted above, police bands comprised solely of police are rare. And where they exist, they are seldom successful. Further, the RCMP is a largely deployed rural force. With the exception of large urban centres, there is insufficient 'critical mass' to support the formation of 'members only' bands. Finally, members join the Force to do police work. Musical talent and ability is incidental. Even where members might be found in sufficient numbers to constitute a band, it is highly unlikely that they will possess the collective talent to adequately and properly represent the Force.

3. that the RCMP support the formation of community bands, combined of regular members, employees and civilians;

As described above, police community bands exist and thrive precisely because they're comprised of community members who bring with them musical talent and willingness to voluntarily serve their community. Issues of partnership aside, combining citizens with police makes good 'business sense': a valuable service is rendered to the community by the community. Band members bring years of practice, tuition and talent, along with their instruments, and volunteer countless thousands of hours of 'VOT' in furtherance of good relations between police and client.

Proposal.

With the advent of the Nova Scotia Tattoo and a commitment by the RCMP to participate in this international venue, thus show-casing the Force's unique tartan and uniform, it is timely to consider a proposal which will not only serve the Force in future, but bring closure to the outstanding issue of community bands comprised of civilians.

It is proposed that a model be adopted commensurate with that employed by the Canadian Armed Forces (Air Command) and other Canadian police services (municipal and provincial). Under such a model:

- civilians participate
- all band members wear the same uniform (regardless of rank)
- rank and service badges are not worn on the uniform; ribbons and medals worn as approp.
- designated band positions wear rank, ie Pipe Major, Drum Sergeant, Drum Major
- musician badge (piper, drummer) may be worn, right upper sleeve

Recommendations.

- that the CEDC recommendations supporting the adoption of the tartan and kilts orders of dress be communicated to the regional representatives of the 125th Anniversary Tartan Subcommittee and other designated stakeholders (ie DSRR Caucus, Public Affairs, etc), along with this position paper,
- that their views and opinions be sought with regard to the above-noted questions and issues,
- that due consideration be given to the community band model proposed here-in,
- that a video conference be convened, no later than March 27, to seek consensus on policy for RCMP Community bands of pipes and drums, and
- that the findings of the subcommittee and stakeholders be adopted as Force-wide policy from this point forward.

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