

US Armed Forces Service Songs & Lyrics

*Researched and written by Mike Concannon
Captain US Navy (Retired)
Webmaster
MOAA Western New York Chapter*

This narrative discusses the history and associated lyrics of the official or quasi-official songs of each individual service. An audio file can be played by clicking on the music icon



which is contained on the page of that individual service.

- *The audio files require use of MS Windows Media Player or Similar; most computers will activate Media Player (or other audio program) and play the music file automatically when the icon is "clicked"*
- *Songs and Backgrounds are discussed in the order of service seniority*

US Army

"The Army Goes Rolling Along" (informally known as "Those Caissons Go Rolling" or the "Caisson Song.") -

The rather obscure term "caisson" refers to a two-wheeled cart, attached to a horse-drawn field artillery piece. The caisson carried two extra ammunition chests, a spare wheel and extra limber pole slung beneath. There was one caisson for each artillery piece in a battery.

Before "The Caisson Song" was adopted as the official tune of the U.S. Army, it was the proud anthem of the U.S. Field Artillery Corps. During a long march in the Philippines, Lieutenant Edmund L. "Snitz" Gruber overheard an officer roar "Come on! Keep 'em Rolling!" Gruber was suddenly inspired, and that night, wrote the now-famous melody. Fellow soldiers helped with the lyrics and soon all six regiments of the U.S. Field Artillery had adopted "The Caisson Song" as a popular marching tune.

The song became a chart-topper during World War I, selling 750,000 copies. In 1948, the Army held a nationwide contest to find an official song. After four years of unsuccessful results and nearly 800 submitted scores, the Army Staff resurrected, and chose, the "Caisson Song."

The original lyrics and arrangement was revised as the U.S. Army song, naming it "The Army Goes Rolling Along." The Army copyrighted the song in 1956.

Although it is not the official Army rendition of today, and having undergone several revisions over many years, The most widely known version was developed by the famous band leader John Phillip Sousa in 1917. It was then known as "U.S. Field Artillery". Because of its immense popularity in WWI, it is probably the most well known rendition.

Continued on next page ----



Those early lyrics are as follows:

*“Over hill, over dale
We have hit the dusty trail,
And the Caissons go rolling along.
In and out, hear them shout,
Counter march and right about,
And the Caissons go rolling along.*

*For it's hi! hi! hee!
In the field artillery,
Shout out your numbers loud and strong,
And where e'er you go,
You will always know
That the Caissons go rolling along.”*

US Navy

"Anchors Aweigh"

The word "weigh" comes from the archaic word meaning to heave, hoist or raise. In the Navy, "aweigh" means that that action has been completed. The anchor is aweigh when it is pulled from the bottom. This event is duly noted in every Navy "Ship's Log" - a formal and legal record of a ship's operations. Examples of actual entries, reflecting the specifics of a ship getting underway from an anchorage, might record:

"2335 - anchors aweigh" - (last of both anchors used)

"0618 - starboard anchor aweigh" (only one anchor used)

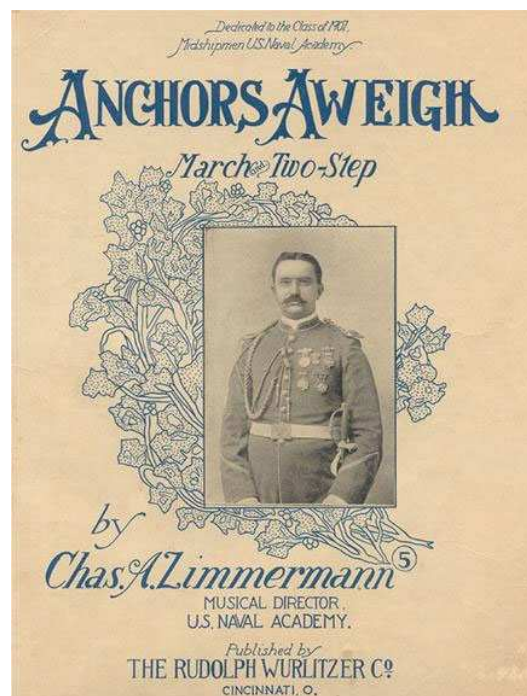
Conversely, a sortie beginning from other than an anchorage might read

"1413 - underway from Norfolk Naval Station Pier 12".

Lieutenant Charles A. Zimmermann had been selected as the bandmaster of the US Naval Academy Band in 1887. At Annapolis, he was asked to compose an Academy "fight song" for the Brigade of Midshipmen. He succeeded in completing a spirited theme that has remained as a bond among Academy Midshipmen and Alumni that still exists today.

The original lyrics from the first verse of the original Academy fight song are, by far, the best known to the public, and are as follows:

***"Anchors Aweigh, my boys, Anchors Aweigh.
Farewell to college joys, we sail at break of day-ay-ay-ay.
Through our last night on shore, drink to the foam,
Until we meet once more,
Here's wishing you a happy voyage home!"***



The song is now taught during Naval training, but the Navy has yet to officially adopt the song. Discussions continue as to the protocols for the use of Anchor's Aweigh during official Naval events.

Another revision to the tune was made in 1950 with a slight change to the melody and changes to the lyrics. The 1950 changes by George Lottman, were spurred by an effort to make the song more relevant to the Navy servicemen, with references to the Naval academy having been dropped from the lyrics.

Due to their unique organizational relationship between the Navy and Marines within the Department of Defense, it is customary, but not required, to follow "Anchors Aweigh" with the Marine Corps Hymn. In a similar fashion, at Marine events where the Hymn is played, "Anchors Aweigh" will often follow.

United States Marine Corps ***United States Marine Corps Hymn***

Following the war with the Barbary Pirates in 1805, the Colors of the Corps was inscribed with the words: "To the Shores of Tripoli." After the Marines had participated in the capture and occupation of Mexico City and the Castle of Chapultepec, otherwise known as the "Halls of Montezuma," the words on the Colors were changed to read: "From the Shores of Tripoli to the Halls of Montezuma."

John Philip Sousa researched the music's origin, and concluded that the melody of the 'Halls of Montezuma' was taken from Jacques Offenbach's (1819-1880) opera, 'Genevieve de Brabant', presented at the Theatre de Bouffes Parisiens, Paris, in 1859.



Every campaign the Marines have taken part in gives birth to an unofficial verse. In 1929, the Commandant of the Marine Corps authorized a version of lyrics, specific to the history of the Corps, as an official version to be the Marines Corps Hymn. On November 21, 1942, the Commandant of the Marine Corps approved a change in the words of the fourth line, first verse, to read, "In air, on land, and sea."

Continued on next page ----

Actually composed of four verses, only the official lyrics of the first verse are usually performed in public ceremonies, and are as follows:

***"From the Halls of Montezuma
To the Shores of Tripoli;
We fight our country's battles
On the land as on the sea;
First to fight for right and freedom
And to keep our honor clean;
We are proud to claim the title
of United States Marine."***

United States Air Force

"The U.S. Air Force" (informally known as "Wild Blue Yonder")

The U.S. Army Air Forces, originally part of the US Army, was established as the US Air Force, a separate service, in 1947.

In 1938 Brigadier General H."Hap" Arnold proposed a song-writing contest to help give the Army Air Corps its own musical identity. As an aside, Arnold, an early Air Corps aviator, became the first Chief of Staff for Air and Chief of the Army Air Forces in 1941.



The contest was sponsored by "Liberty" magazine. The winning entry was a last-minute submission from Mr Robert Crawford, an amateur pilot. Crawford (1899 -1961) was a successful musical professional who had purchased a plane in order to fly himself from one concert engagement to the next , and had a good feel for his subject matter. Consequently he was able to compose music and create lyrics which addressed some essentials of aerial combat. Crawford was the one to officially introduce "Off We Go" to the public when he sang it at the Cleveland Air Races on September 2, 1939.

Continued on next page ----

The selection committee, made up of airmen's wives, unanimously selected the song. Informally known as "Wild Blue Yonder" or "The Air Force Song" it is now formally titled "The U.S. Air Force"

The original first page of Crawford's score was carried to the moon by Air Force Colonel David R. Scott and Lieutenant Colonel James B. Irwin on July 30, 1971. Their Apollo 15 flight, also manned by Major Alfred M. Worden, held the first all-Air Force space crew.

Composed of four verses, only the official lyrics of the first verse are usually performed in public ceremonies, as follows:

*"Off we go into the wild blue yonder,
Climbing high into the sun;
Here they come zooming to meet our thunder,
At 'em boys, Give 'er the gun! (Give 'er the gun now!)
Down we dive, spouting our flame from under,
Off with one helluva roar!
We live in fame or go down in flame. Hey!
Nothing'll stop the U.S. Air Force!"*

United States Coast Guard

"Semper Paratus" - (Latin for always ready, or always prepared)

The original words and music were written by Captain Francis S. Van Boskerck, USCG. The words were written in 1922 while serving as the Commanding Officer of the revenue cutter YAMACRAW. A capable piano player, he then wrote the music in 1927, while on duty in Unalaska, Alaska.

The first line of each chorus was changed in 1969. The current verse, and a second chorus, were written by Homer Smith, 3rd Naval District Coast Guard quartet, Chief Cole, others and LT Walton Butterfield USCGR in 1943. The current verse, as well as a second chorus, were written by Homer Smith, 3rd Naval District Coast Guard quartet, Chief Cole, Walton Butterfield in 1943. In 1969, the first line of each verse was changed.

To Captain Van Boskerck, "Semper Paratus" had been a Revenue Cutter and Coast Guard watchword. The words themselves date back to ancient times. No official recognition was given to the phrase until it appeared in 1910 on the Coast Guard "ensign", or service flag. Captain Van Boskerck hoped to give his song as much recognition as "Semper Fidelis" of the Marines and "Anchors Aweigh" of the Navy.

Author's note: *the term "ensign" refers to a ceremonial flag, which comes from the French for "insignia". The Naval rank of Ensign refers to the historical duty of a junior officer to care for a warship's ensign.*

Continued on next page ----

Although the music is very familiar to the general public, the lyrics are somewhat less well known than those from the other services. The lyrics of the first verse in the current version are as follows:

***"From North and South and East and West,
The Coast Guard's in the fight.
Destroying subs and landing troops,
The Axis feels our might.
For we're the first invaders,
On every fighting field.
Afloat, ashore, on men and Spars,
You'll find the Coast Guard shield."***

Addendum: **John Phillip Sousa and his connections to the US Military**

Sousa was born in Washington, DC in 1854. His parents were of Portuguese, Spanish and

Bavarian (German) descent. When Sousa reached the age of 13, his father, a trombonist in the Marine Band, enlisted his son in the United States Marine Corps as a Band apprentice. Sousa served his apprenticeship for seven years, and apparently learned to play all the wind instruments. He returned to the Marine Band as its head in 1880, and remained as its conductor until 1892. He was a Sergeant Major for most of his second period of Marine service and was a Warrant Officer at the time he resigned.

Sousa organized his own band the year he left the Marine Band. The Sousa Band performed in over 15,000 concerts over its forty years, from 1892 to 1931.

He volunteered to serve as a bandmaster in the U.S. Army during the Spanish-American War but was unable to serve due to illness. Later, however (1917) he rewrote the "Caisson Song" as discussed above.

During World War I, he was commissioned a Lieutenant Commander in the Naval Reserve and led the Navy Band. After returning to his own band at the end of the war, he continued to wear his naval uniform for most of his concerts and other public appearances.

Sousa wrote 136 marches; some of his most popular and notable are:

- ***"U.S. Field Artillery" (1917)***
- ***"Semper Fidelis" (1888) - Official March of the United States Marine Corps (not the same as the Marine Corps Hymn)***
- ***"The Washington Post March" (1889)***
- ***"The Stars and Stripes Forever" (1896) - National March of the United States***

