



United States Military Academy Band  
West Point, New York 10996



## The Hellcats

It is through the group of buglers and rudimental drummers known as the *Hellcats* that the United States Military Academy Band continues over 220 years of field music tradition at West Point. Their legend began early in the American Revolution, when units of George Washington's Continental Army, including fifers and drummers, established the garrison of West Point in January of 1778. Following the Revolution, West Point continued as an active federal garrison and remained so through the founding of the Military Academy in 1802. During this period, fifers and drummers assigned to artillery and engineer units on West Point continued the tradition.

During the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the War Between the States, the drum was the primary source of battlefield communication. Throughout the day it signaled various orders, and its steady beat kept the rhythm for road marches and troop movements. The bugle served an increasingly important role starting in the 1800's. Army commanders grew more dependent on the bugle's bold, brilliant sound to give commands both in camp and over the din of battle.

The *Hellcats'* prime mission today is to provide musical support to the U.S. Corps of Cadets. In addition to sounding *Reveille* and *Retreat* at the garrison flagpole, the *Hellcats* play for marching drills, military reviews and parades. Each weekday they provide martial music as the cadets march into the mess hall. As the football season closes in on the annual Army-Navy game, special *Hellcat* arrangements of traditional West Point gridiron songs fan the Army fighting spirit.

*Hellcat* buglers and drummers also have the sad task of performing muffled drums and *Taps* for West Point funerals. Annually, a bugler plays *Taps* at the tombs of presidents Ulysses S. Grant and Franklin D. Roosevelt on the anniversaries of their births.

Pride, intense *esprit de corps* and a sense of historical continuity inspire the distinguished service of today's *Hellcats*. With their precise marching, embellished by the twirls of silver bugles and intricate rudimental drumming, the group delights many thousands of spectators each year. In 1994, the *Hellcats* were honored to participate in the deactivation parade of the Allied Strike Force as it made its final departure from the city of Berlin. The *Hellcats* have been featured on every major network morning show, they have been warmly received at military tattoos in Atlanta, Georgia and Hamilton, Ontario. In 2002 the group performed in

Carnegie Hall with the New York Pops Orchestra under the direction of Skitch Henderson and for the Fourth of July with the Boston Pops Orchestra under Keith Lockwood. Equipped with instruments designed and hand-made specifically for them, the *Hellcats* enable the United States Military Academy Band to maintain faithful renditions of traditional American military music, and daily to provide the Corps of Cadets with a piece of living history.