



## Press Release

March 17, 2014

# VHS Marchin' Cats hit national competition level by adding dazzling Flag Corps *Band's reunion March 28-29 to celebrate all facets of historic success*



**IT TOOK MORE THAN MUSIC:** The VHS Marchin' Cats incorporated a wide array of entertainment and judge-wowing tactics and strategies to reach the National competitive level that helped earn the band many awards. A major addition brought by band director Frank Butenschon was the Flag Corps, shown here in their dazzling gold capes as they posed in 1968.

VALDOSTA, GA. – Valdosta High School Marchin' Cats 2014 Reunion organizers are searching for as many former performers as they can find for the March 28-29 event.

Foremost in organizers' goals is to insure that not just musicians are sought to attend because the National acclaim won by the Marchin' Cats from 1962 to 1977 included several other elements. Those included the Honor Guard, Color Guard, and especially the Flag Corps -- a unit of young women performers that greatly enhanced the program's ability to compete and win many awards. Included in this release is their story.

The VHS Marchin' Cats 2014 Reunion will be held at the Holiday Inn and Conference Center. Registrations, to date, number near 110 as organizers continue their exhaustive search to reach former members. The potential for as many as 200 to attend is possible, as more registrations come in every day. A major theme of this Reunion

is Celebrating The Championship Years from 1962-77, when the program won National acclaim.

### **BUTENSCHON CONSIDERS NEW ELEMENTS**

When Frank Butenschon came to Valdosta High School in 1962 to begin the job of band director, he wanted to build a marching band that could compete at the National level.

Now 76 and retired, "Mr. B" as he is known, took the VHS job after some prodding from then Superintendent of Valdosta City Schools W.G. Nunn. Butenschon had come to Valdosta from Alabama in 1960 to serve as the band director at Valdosta Junior High School, a post which included duties as assistant band director for VHS.

Having participated in and witnessed the more nationally competitive bands in Alabama, Butenschon had a vision to expand the VHS program to a larger sized band that could compete at the more competitive levels he had experienced while attending high school in his native state, and while marching in the Auburn University Tigers marching band, where he graduated prior to coming to Valdosta in 1960.



## Early days of Flag Corps brought decisions on uniforms, marching strategies...

Butenschon said he also realized that the program's handful of baton twirlers already performing with the VHS band would not be enough to improve the program's overall performance to reach those loftier goals.

### REDESIGNING VISION INCLUDES FLAG CORPS

Butenschon said he recognized a movement within the marching genre that involved significant changes of the style in marching bands at the high school and collegiate levels -- from a military style of performance to a more entertaining and contemporary format. So the then carrot-topped new director created a plan to redesign the band.

The first step was renaming the VHS marching band. Taking his cue from the wildly popular football team -- the Valdosta High Wildcats -- Butenschon came up with the name "Valdosta High School Marchin' Cats."

But the name was only one of many changes. Butenschon knew he needed to increase the 'wow' factor of the band. After redesigning the popular

Majorette Corps into Featured Twirlers, he decided to introduce a completely new unit to the Marchin' Cats - the Flag Corps.

As perhaps the most dramatic and visually successful unit of the band at that time, this group was initially intended to be a dance line. Because the young ladies carried 'short flags' featuring triangles of black and gold satin, the name Flag Corps seemed more appropriate. Although props such as hats or canes were sometimes used in the routines as in a dance line, the team was always referred to as The Flag Corps.

Their creation as a featured unit in the band actually served two purposes, at least in the first few years. First, they added to the overall impression of the newly revamped style of the band. Second, because there was a requirement of physical beauty and fitness in order for a young lady to become a part of the Flag Corps, Butenschon believed the creation of the unit would attract more young men to join the band.



**EARLY DAYS IN VINTAGE UNIFORMS:** During their first two years, the Flag Corps marched in black corduroy uniforms with military style jackets combined with short black skirts and white boots -- a style of the 1960s.



## Mrs. Susan Butenschon becomes Corps' director, helps create tasteful, classy look...



The Valdosta High School Marchin' Cats, including the band's Flag Corps, in front, pose at the doorsteps of the Georgia Governor's Mansion in Atlanta in January 1971. The storied band was invited to perform at Gov. Jimmy Carter's inauguration.

And he was exactly right.

During their first two years, the Flag Corps marched in black corduroy uniforms with military style jackets combined with short black skirts and white boots -- a style of the 1960s. But in 1963 those heavy black uniforms were replaced with black stretch uniforms that featured sparkling gold sequins on the front and a long fringe at the bottom. The new look also included small sequined headpieces, white gloves and boots, and large black and gold pom-poms for those boots. In those early years, Mrs. Susan Butenschon and several of the Flag Corps mothers designed and sewed satin capes of black and gold satin for the team.

Utilizing the high-step method of marching, the Flag Corps was usually featured at front and center of the band during halftime shows and parades. Mrs. Butenschon was the Director of the Flag Corps, and helped the team with their overall presentation, although she says they were all very talented and that team members, themselves, created most of their unique routines. As for the overall approach to the Flag Corps, Mrs. Butenschon took her lead from her husband's vision for the band.

"It was easy to be successful because no one in the region had ever seen a unit like them before," Mrs. Butenschon said. "They had nothing to compare them with because they were the first."

The Flag Corps was not originally funded as part of the band budget because they were considered by the School Board as non-vital to the make-up of the band.



## Susan Butenschon helps Flag Corps overcome minor squabbles and controversies...

Responsible for purchasing their own custom designed uniforms of black with gold sequins on the front, the team also had to purchase the material for their flags, headpieces and white boots. Additionally, the girls also were required to wear black fishnet hose, red lipstick and hairpieces made to accentuate their appearance, purchased at their own expense.

As the team began, the majority of the complaints were about a particular cosmetic. Mrs. Butenschon remembers all the arguments about that *HATED* red lipstick, which was not in style for young ladies during those early years.

“Those girls came up with every excuse possible why they could not wear that lipstick,” she said during a recent interview. “One girl would say that she didn’t look good in red lipstick, and another would say that her mother wouldn’t let her wear red lipstick. They put up quite a fight. But, they always ended up wearing the lipstick. They all looked so good under the lights.”

The hairpieces were also a point of contention among the girls during those early years. Mrs. Butenschon explained that it was important to keep the girls’ hair out of their eyes during performances, and hairspray didn’t always do the trick. So she was able to secure some samples and ultimately matched



**BRINGING PRIDE’S RESULT HOME:** Frank and Susan Butenschon, lower right, join VHS Marchin’ Cats members on the bus home after winning “The Greatest Band In Dixie” in New Orleans for the second time in March 1972.

the hairpieces.

“I found the perfect match for each girl, and wrote down the color so that they would know what to buy at the store,” she said.

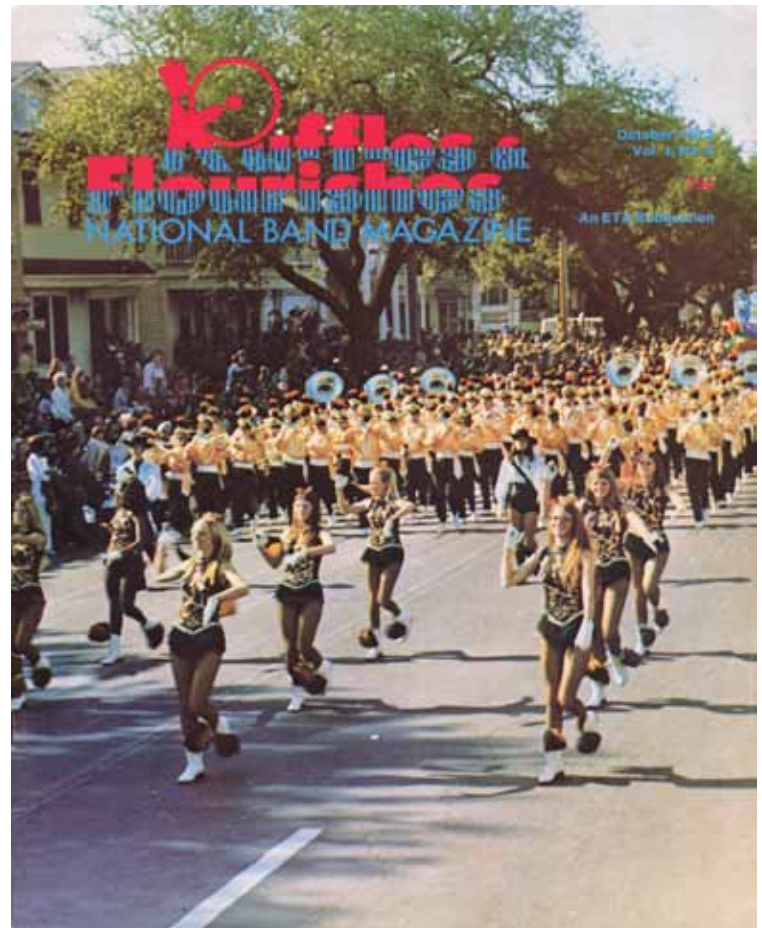
Still, Mrs. Butenschon herself meticulously “bobby-pinned” into place each girl’s hairpiece and headpiece before games and competitions. No one who ever watched the Marchin’ Cats Flag Corps perform could ever tell what discomfort those hairpieces sometimes created.

The Flag Corps was not just an ancillary unit of “pretty girls” in the band, Mrs. Butenschon said. They were graded and judged at all competitions. They were featured and therefore subject to great scrutiny during their performances.



## LEADING THE WAY TO VICTORIES:

The Marchin' Cats Flag Corps always took the lead onto the field or street when a competition was at hand. They were as heavily scrutinized by competition judges as were marching band members. But they always scored Superior ratings thanks to their adherence to the same stringent work ethic and practice of the Marchin' Cats' motto: **PRIDE -- Performance Resulting In Daily Effort.** Here the Flag Corps. makes front cover with the band in the October 1972 edition of the nationally circulated *Ruffles and Flourishes National Band Magazine*.



They drilled all routines, spacing and marching until they were in complete sync. Their dedication, sacrifice and hard work paid off. During the years that Mr. B directed the Marchin' Cats until he left the program in 1977, the Flag Corps never earned less than a Superior rating at any graded competition.

They were always first to march into a competition zone during all the Marchin' Cats appearances at The Greatest Band in Dixie contest in New Orleans in 1965, 1969 and 1972; and were out front at the Winter National Field Competition in Miami in 1973 and 1975.

The Flag Corps also was out front in both the Field and Parade Competitions of the 1974 and 1977 Festival of States in St. Petersburg, Florida. They were prominently featured on the October 1972 cover of *Ruffles and Flourishes National Band Magazine*. Add to this impressive list the Flag Corps' service during the Marchin' Cats' win in 1975 as The Largo Invitational Field Champions, held at Largo High School, Florida.



## Marchin' Cats Flag Corps contributed significantly to band's national rankings...

The unit became so popular that in later years, it wasn't uncommon to have 200 young ladies try out for 16 slots on the team. To win an audition and make this prestigious, featured squad was considered to be quite an accomplishment.

The Flag Corps, a key unit of the redesigned band, certainly helped bring to the forefront the "modern" approach to the marching band concepts that Butenschon had envisioned. The Flag Corps contributed significantly to repeated national rankings in major competitions earned by the Marchin' Cats.



The VHS Marchin' Cats' Flag Corps -- shown middle field here -- greatly improved the band's shows.

### **ORGANIZERS WELCOME ALL FORMER MARCHIN' CATS TO REUNION**

Reunion organizers request all to visit the reunion web site at [www.marchincatsreunion.com](http://www.marchincatsreunion.com) to enjoy a treasure trove of photos, videos, audio clips and more from those glory years.

Former and current members who wish to attend should contact Karen Lyons Pierce at [kvlpierce@bellsouth.net](mailto:kvlpierce@bellsouth.net) or 229-300-0345, or Carole Stenbridge Ausum, 229-251-3604.

Registration forms can be obtained on the web site with mailing instructions. The two-day event also will feature a trip to renowned Bazemore-Hyder Stadium, where the Marchin' Cats still set award winning standards to this day.