



US NAVY BAND UNIT #22

Throughout most of the twentieth century, all United States Navy battleships had band units embarked. Their members not only played at official functions, for crew entertainments and in competitions, but when not performing they were assigned various shipboard duties, right along with the rest of the ships' crews.

At 0800 every morning they played the National Anthem. This is what the bands aboard the several battleships moored at Pearl Harbor...including the USS ARIZONA (BB-39)...were about to do on Sunday, December 7, 1941. But at 0750 everything changed, forever, when the Japanese attacked.

Dropping their instruments on the fantail of the ARIZONA, the twenty-one members of US Navy Band Unit #22 rushed forward to their battle station. The entire band unit had been assigned to pass ammunition from the ship's magazines to her #1 main gun turret several decks above.

When an aerial bomb penetrated deep into the ARIZONA, it caused a cataclysmic explosion that completely destroyed the forward part of the battleship. All twenty-one members of the band were amongst the ARIZONA's 1,177 ship's company who died that day. The remains of only 150 of the stricken ship's dead were ever recovered. None were members of the band.

Band Unit #22 is the only musical organization in the United States Navy to have been formed together, trained together, transferred to a battleship together, competed together, fought together...and died together.



The band's members hailed from fourteen different states and had nick-names like 'Buttercup', 'Chowhound' and 'Scrooge'. The oldest was the bandmaster, who was thirty-one; the youngest just seventeen.

Their total time of service onboard the ill-fated battleship was less than six months. The remains of the twenty-one members of Band Unit #22 and hundreds of their shipmates are entombed where they perished.

Band Unit #22 was organized at the United States Navy School of Music in Washington, DC in January 1941. Following a few months of training, the complete ensemble was assigned to the USS ARIZONA. They departed the Continental United States in May and joined their ship in Hawaii the next month.

Once there, they quickly established themselves as one of the best bands in the Pacific Fleet. Part of the Navy's pre-World War II program of recreation at Pearl Harbor was to conduct an annual 'battle of the bands'. A series of contest eliminations began in September 1941. Each competing band performed a swing number, a ballad, a specialty tune and took turns playing for a jitterbug contest.

Band Unit #22 won the first contest, and was one of two semi-final winners in a later round that was held in the Fleet Recreation Services' arena on November 22, 1941. A second semi-final was held on Saturday night, December 6, 1941.

The winners that night were the bands from the battleships PENNSYLVANIA and TENNESSEE. Although the ARIZONA's band did not play then, most of its members were present. Naturally, they wanted to 'scope out' their competition. Plus, the ARIZONA's and the TENNESSEE's bands had attended the School of Music at the same time and had graduated together.

The four semi-finalists were scheduled to meet two weeks later to determine the winner of what was billed as the 'Battle of Music 1941'. That planned contest never took place. Instead, sometime in 1942 the Navy's Fleet Recreation Services asked the members of the navy bands still stationed in Hawaii to vote on which band should be awarded first place in the aborted contest.

The ARIZONA's band was the unanimous choice. Not just because of their tragic loss, but as several musicians from other bands said...they were the best band. The trophy was suitably engraved and includes the names of Band Unit #22's members.



Now known as *The USS ARIZONA Band Trophy*, it sits in a place of honor at the ARIZONA Memorial Museum, overlooking the ship's...and the US Navy Band Unit 22's...final resting place.

