

DETROIT

Race & Business in Detroit:
Schemes, Dreams and Dismay

Sunday

The Lone Ranger's Son
On Dad and the Ponies

The Magazine Michigan's Metropolis

October 24, 1971

Detroit Free Press



By BARRY GARELICK
For Detroit Magazine

Camaraderie. I guess that's what does it. It does it in the Marines, so why not the Michigan Marching Band? I know that's one of the reasons I joined the band my freshman year at the University of Michigan. Plus the fact that ever since I was (Turn to Page 12)

Are You Proud (Shuffle Shuffle) to Be a (Yuba! Yuba!) Michigan Bandsman? Ladies (Hiss Hiss) Need Not Apply



Well, there they are, the *FINEST BAND IN THE LAND*, tooting away while (below) extracurricular activities proceed apace on the sunny sidelines.

Continued from Page 1

nine, it was drummed into my head by television, by teachers in elementary and high school, and by gum-chewing marching band fanatics of the 40s and 50s, that the Michigan Band was and is *THE FINEST* band in the whole U.S.A.

I've run into many bandsmen during my four years at Michigan. They all wear the same jacket; the heart side of the chest stuck out just a little farther than the other side; the same glassy look in their eyes; their heads just a little further up. I've talked to these "Men of Michigan" as they are called, and we've reminisced over the shows, the dance steps, the painful drill sessions, and the blaring badgerings of Dr. William D. Revelli, ex-director of the Michigan Marching Band; affectionately referred to as "Chief," derisively laughed at as "the bald headed cab driver."

William D. Revelli is a short man, bald, quick tempered, with an eye and ear for perfection, (which misses mistakes just as conveniently as it spots them), a rotund body, a heart that beats for the American Way, but most of all for "his boys:" the 182 Marching Men of Michigan.

Assisting Dr. Revelli all those years was George B. Cavender, the drill instructor and originator of many of the band's ingenious marching patterns and dances.



Cover and photography by *BARRY BATES*

He is the band's director this year, a position, say many bandsmen, that Cavender should have had in the first place.

It's hard to say what made me try out for the band. I certainly wasn't athletic; I had never marched before; I hated football. But I *DID* want respect. I expected respect from girls; I expected girls to "flip" over the fact that I was a "Man of Michigan."

I went to the organizational meeting of the Michigan Marching Band which is held "traditionally" (almost everything in the band is based upon some obscure tradition that no one except Revelli really understands) on the day before class registration. I arrived slightly late, unaware of one of the band's many stock cliches: *TO BE EARLY IS TO BE ON TIME.*

The meeting was held in Harris Hall, one of the oldest buildings on the U. of M. campus. The walls are covered with ancient photographs of every Marching Band show ever performed. On the bottom of each layout is an identical photo of Dr. Revelli and George B. Cavender, both wearing conductor's uniforms, both staring out at some unseen object; eyes squinting, their faces wearing an expression of perfectionist genius and inspiration, and God only knows when the picture was taken.

Dr. Revelli opened the meeting by claiming that he was Dr. Revelli and no, he was not standing on his knees (he is quite short). This remark was met by a burst of laughter and applause. Dr. Revelli beamed knowingly. He wore a baseball cap which bore the letter "C" on its front, standing for either Chief or Cab Driver depending on everyone's mood.

"Well, men," Revelli began, "I want to welcome all of you to the finest band in the land." *Loud cheering and shuffling of feet.* "As you know, tryouts are tomorrow, and then we have a really busy schedule. Our team is going to be great this year —" *Loud cheering, applause and shuffling of feet once more.* "I see a lot of new faces here today, and that makes me happy. You new people are going to find that the Michigan Band is one of the most rewarding experiences you will ever have in your life." *Shuffling of feet only.* I began to get curious about the shuffling of feet. I was also aware that almost everyone looked bigger and older than me.

"I've been directing this band for over thirty years now, and I know I'VE enjoyed every minute of it; the parades, the formations, the dances, and even though it's been thirty years, I'll tell you men something; that first moment of every pre-game show, when you run out of that stadium tunnel out onto that field gives me the same thrill that I had when I first saw it. I never get tired of it" *shuffle shuffle*, "and I don't think that any of you will." *Shuffle shuffle CHEER.* Of course he was referring to the famous Michigan Band entry; that neck-breakingly fast drum cadence, 182 marching men charging out onto the field; always welcomed by the roar of the crowd.

"I've seen faces come and go." My face itched but I was afraid to scratch it. "And it's a strange but wonderful thing." Dr. Revelli ran his hand over his bald head and squinted his eyes. "We have a spirit here. I think you know what I mean. This meeting is the only time in the year when we talk about it. I don't have to tell you. I never tell you to have spirit. No one tells you to have spirit. But it's here. It's always been here," *shuffle shuffle*, "and I think it's WONDERFUL! There's a sense of competition in this band, I think you'll find. Ranks compete with other ranks, instruments compete with other instruments, and we're all, each one of us, striving to be the best. And by doing so, this whole band becomes the best. Because we are THE FINEST BAND IN THE LAND!" *Shuffle Shuffle CHEER!* I was impressed by all the spirit.

"Now this doesn't mean that we rest on our laurels." A hush, and the faces of the bandsmen became very serious. Cavender, sitting in his chair at the front of the room squinted his eyes as he looked us over. "We still have to work to be the finest. And remember our motto, men. We're not as good as but . . ."

"BETTER THAN" shouted the band in unison.

"That's right. We ARE better than any band in the land. But that's because every one of us cares. We're all MEN here." There are in fact, no women in the Michigan Marching Band.

"I've talked to parents of bandsmen, and they all say the same thing. They say that something has happened to their boy. A change. Something about the way he moves. Their heads are held a little higher, and they walk a little straighter," *shuffle shuffle*, "and their chests stick out just a little further than before. I think you know what I mean. You just can't help sticking

your chest out further and holding your head up higher when you know you're part of THE FINEST BAND IN THE LAND!" *Deafening, deafening cheer, people clapping each other on the shoulders*, and the freshmen are looking around, smiling shyly, trying to figure out what all the shuffling of feet is about.

"Well, I hope you all make it, you new men." It's inevitable. I've never heard of anyone NOT making it to the Michigan Band. But that's supposed to be a secret. Traditional.

"But I think I've said enough. I'll be saying plenty more this year, don't you worry about that." *Gentle laughter and shuffling of feet.* "I better be saying plenty, men, unless you want Michigan State to have a better band than us!" *Loud hissing, and laughter.* The main threat of the year. How many times on the drill field do they say "State's picking their feet up higher than you guys" to get incentive. And when that game was over, they'd hold Ohio State over our heads, but we'd always be the best; always the finest.

"All right, then," Revelli went on. "Here's a fellow who's been waiting to talk to you. We all know him. We all love him. My assistant director, your drill instructor, "The Whistle," George B. Cavender . . ." *Loudest cheering and applause*, and George B. Cavender came up to the podium. Dark, tough looking, LOUD voice, wore a baseball cap that had an "M" on it, a whistle around his neck, skin like leather, a tall man, a powerful looking man, squinty eyes of perfection and he shouted: "OK BAND. GIVE ME A YUBA!"

"Yuba!" shouted the band.

"What?" Cavender bent his head as if he didn't hear.

"YUBA!!"

"What??"

"YUBAAAAAAAAA YAYYYYYYYYYY!"

"OK, men. Now I know that all the freshmen are looking at each other, and saying to themselves, what the heck is Yuba? Well, it's part of a tradition here, and I think the longer you're here, the more you'll understand. But actually, what it is, it's kind of the band's own private cheer. You see, years ago, I gave a command to the band, which somehow didn't get heard. All the band heard was the word 'Yuba' and no one knew what the command meant, and it wasn't till later that we got the whole mess straightened out. Well, the joke stuck, and we've kept that cheer ever since. I think we're all rather fond of it here." His voice became soft just then, and he looked almost gentle to my innocent eyes. Feet *shuffled* gently, and George started talking again.

"Well, men" (Always men) "tomorrow are tryouts, and after that, we start rehearsing. I see we've got a lot of new men with us today. All right. Old Men! On your feet!" And in one split second, the old bandsmen were on their feet, standing perfectly at attention, eyes front, chest out, heads up, proud!

"New men, these are the old men. You will be working with these men. They are good men. They've marched with Michigan before and they will be able to show you the right way to march. These are good men; these are Michigan Men! All right. Old men, down!" And in another split second the old bandsmen sat down, completely at ease.

"All right!" New men! On your feet!" Creek, creek,

one, two, three seconds and we finally made it, not at attention, not at all sure of ourselves, greeted by a loud ominous, angry hiss from the old bandsmen. I saw for the first time that the boy sitting next to me was also a freshman.

"New men, you're going to be a part of the finest band in the land. You are going to be drilling with the old men, and we're going to teach you how to march, how to play, how to stand, but most of all, we're going to teach you how to be a MAN." *Shuffling of feet* from the old men. "Sometimes that takes five minutes. Sometimes a half hour. Sometimes two weeks. But when that first game comes up, you will all be men. All right! New men, down!" Down we went. I wondered what the hell it all meant. What were they going to do to me on that practice field?

"Well, I've said just about all I want to say, so now here's someone who wants to talk to you. You've known him and loved him for the three years he's been with Michigan: Drum Major, Dick Follet!" *Large applause, cheers, shuffling of feet*, and a few more words about spirit from Dick Follet, who as drum major of the finest band in the land, was logically the finest man in the land.

"Michigan is not as good as but . . ."

"BETTER THAN!" shouted the band in return to the drum major's use of the most famous cliché in the land.

And so it went. They passed out song sheets to all the new men, so we could sing some school songs; all part of getting in the spirit. We sang *The Victors*, Michigan's fight song which made the freshman next to me sing his heart out.

"Something always happens to me whenever I hear that song," he explained to me through wet eyes.

We sang "I'll Ne'er Forget my College Days" a nostalgic old college song, whose words I can only remember the first two lines of: "I'll ne'er forget my college days/My dear sincere old college days." The men in the band snickered as they sang it, not because they thought the words were schmaltzy, but because they were other words to it, sung only when Revelli was not around: "I'll ne'er forget my William D./That dear sincere old S.O.B." I also have forgotten the rest of the words to that.

TRYOUTS WEREN'T HALF as hard as I thought they would be; as I said before, everyone makes it. And the same day, I found out what the shuffling of feet was all about. It meant approval, as opposed to hissing, which meant disapproval. Everything has a purpose in the band.

George Cavender led the drilling. He was resourceful, and brilliant in the way he could get 182 men to do what he wanted them to do. He wasn't half the ornery sergeant I had thought he would be.

"That fellow in the 12th rank did it wrong. That's why you're doing it again, men. This is what is known as social pressure." And he'd laugh, and we'd do it again.

"Your attention is lousy, men. Drill the position of attention!"

Dick Follet would call the band to attention. George would squint his eyes and say: "Feet!"

"TOGETHER!" the band would shout.

Continued on Page 14



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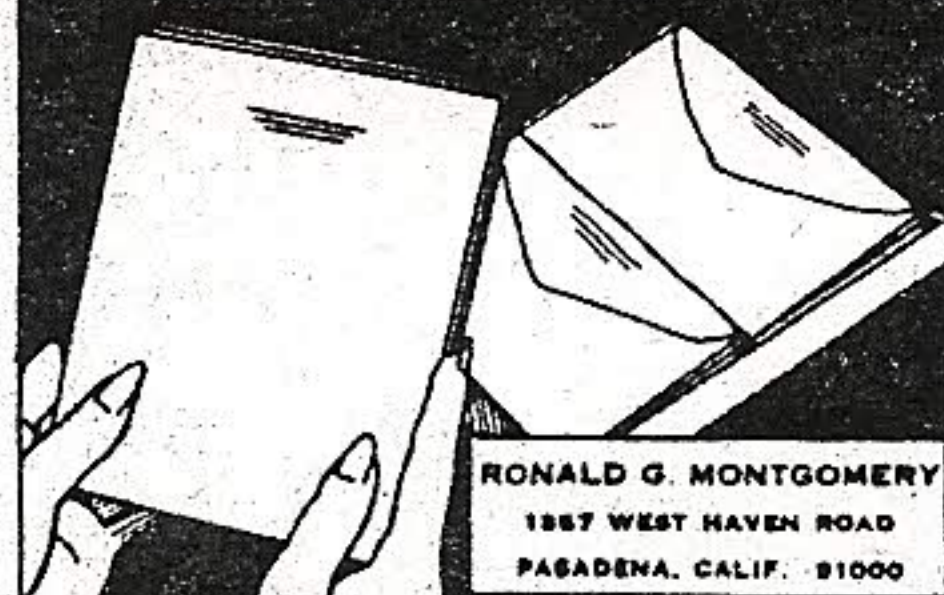
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"I want you saxophones to go home tonight and look in the mirror and say, 'I am looking at a liar.'"

Continued

"Stomach!"
"IN!"
"Well, c'mon, get that stomach in. OK! Chest!"
"OUT!"
"Well, get it out, there. Shoulders!"
"BACK!"
"Chin!"
"UP!"

"Well, all right. This is how you stand at attention. No movement!"

We would be tired. Everyday except Sunday, (and of course Saturday, when there was a game) we rehearsed, from four till six. We would stand, march, sweat, get cramps and do it again and again until it was perfect. And every few minutes, either Revelli, or Cavender, or Dick Follet would holler: "ARE YOU PROUD TO BE A MICHIGAN BANDSMAN?"

"YEAH!" we would all shout, for not one of us would give up our cramps and sweat for anything else.

"THEN LOOK PROUD! STAND PROUD! MARCH PROUD! YOU'RE A MICHIGAN BANDSMAN! THE FINEST BAND IN THE LAND!"

"Yeah!" we'd yell, and then march our hearts out. Spirit. Camaraderie. We would be measured to make sure we were standing on the exact spot we were supposed to be standing on. Cavender relied on bamboo poles with pre-measured markings. Revelli relied on his own pacing.

"That man's off!" Revelli would yell and he would pace out the correct distance, and sure enough, the man would be off by three feet. When Cavender measured the same man, however, he would only be off by three inches.

Dr. Revelli picked on individuals, on ranks, on instruments and gave them long lectures on what they were doing wrong, and what it meant to the pride of the band. Revelli would be conducting and his ears would pick out a wrong note out of 180 right ones. "Stop, stop!" he'd say.

All would look up and smile sheepishly. "Who did it? Raise your hand."

Someone would raise his hand. "Now that was a STUPID mistake. You were a fool just then. You may be smart, you may have all A's here at the University; one of the finest Universities in the land" *shuffle shuffle*, "but you were still a fool. You could go through a traffic light when it's red and have all A's and the judge would say 'Son, you may have all A's, but you were a fool just then.'"

The bandsman would hang his head until the diatribe was over, and the music would resume.

One time, Revelli stopped the music and no one raised his hand. "Who did it?" Revelli glared, veins popping on his bald head, eyes popping, teeth clenched. "It was in the saxophones, come on, who did it? Raise your hand." No hand went up. "All right. All right. I want you saxophones to go home tonight, all of you, and look in the mirror and say 'I am looking at the face of a liar.'"

Cavender was like a strict mother. Revelli was like a proud, tyrannical father. He was hated, and yet, bandsmen shuffled their feet in approval of him. He was a uniter. He served as a common hatred, which brought about a slew of Dr. Revelli jokes and wise-cracks, which in turn brought about camaraderie, which in turn brought about a strange love for the man.

9:30 in the morning. Saturday. First week. Drill practice at Wines field, an old rundown muddy

field, which has since been paved over with asphalt, allowing bandsman the privilege of getting shin splinters, instead of tripping in the mud and impaling themselves on their instruments.

9:30 in the morning. Only a week away from the first game, which also happened to be band day. 9:30 in the morning. Some of the bandsmen were drunk the last night. They felt it that morning.

"ARE YOU PROUD TO BE A MICHIGAN BANDSMAN?"

"Yeah!"

"Ohhh," said the boy next to me, really feeling his hangover.

"ALL RIGHT MEN! WHEN I BLOW THE WHISTLE I WANT TO HEAR A BIG COUNT!" yelled Cavender.

"That's right," said Revelli. "You boys are like babies. I can't hear you from three feet away. I could yell louder than the whole bunch of you." And on and on he went. Cavender wanted to get on with the marching. Revelli went on with his lecture.

"Ohhh," said the boy next to me. "Why doesn't he shut up?"

"MEN!" Cavender said again. "THIS COUNT IS GOING TO MEAN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH WHEN YOU'RE OUT THERE ON THAT FIELD!" Life? Death? What was the audience going to do? Were they going to shoot me if I did it wrong?

"MEN! THE AUDIENCE IS A VERY MEAN THING! THEY DON'T SEE 181 MEN DOING IT RIGHT! THEY SEE THE ONE MORON WHO'S DOING IT WRONG! NOW GIVE ME A BIG COUNT!"

One week left, and somehow we managed to get the show together, somehow I managed to get my uniform on right, somehow I managed to march through the show without fainting, although I never once played an audible note; I was always out of breath. I played the clarinet, and that was the first time I had been in a marching band of any kind. It wasn't until the end of the season that I was able to play and march together. But when I went home that Sunday after band day, I felt like a soldier home on leave, and since I had never played Army as a youngster, I really got into it. My parents remarked on my stance, on the look in my eye, the way my chest stuck out a little more. I DID IT! I WAS A MAN!

I walked around the campus knowing that I was a man; just waiting for girls to ask if it was really true I was in the Marching Band. But my daydreams withered, for no girls asked, and very few cared; as a matter of fact, very few people cared about the Marching Band. So what? The music and shows were 20 to 30 years behind the times, so they said. My daydream of gorgeous girls turned into one of girls from the 30s who liked the band when it was big, girls from the 40s and early 50s; when the band was popular, when it was new, when it wowed them, when it SOLD!

"SELL, SELL, SELL," yelled George B. Cavender at us 182 Marching Men of Michigan. "Sell that dance! We're not getting one-tenth the applause that we used to get! The audience is too busy passing people up the stands. They're just not interested! Sell SELL SELL!!!"

We sold. Boy we sold. Danced our old hearts out all over the field. I still shake when I think about waiting to go on for pre-game and half-time; hoping I wouldn't make a mistake, feeling suddenly very sleepy, then BANG: *Tweet tweet tweet tweet*; READY (two three) LIFT, rum tummy tum tum BOOM. "PICK 'EM UP!" I'd hear coming from

the mouth of George B. Cavender, and sure enough MY legs would be dropping.

Yes, in the fifties it SOLD, in the forties it REALLY SOLD and when Revelli first took over, the Michigan band really was the FINEST BAND in the LAND. But the fad has died out, no real innovations have been made; oh Michigan is precise all right, and as far as I'm concerned, the most precise, OK? But the stoned-out hippies and elitists started coming to football games, and "Well, man, football is football, it's groovy, it's like LIFE man, I dig it, and the band, it's FUNKY, man, but it's so military, you know? I mean you know what Nietzsche would say don't you?"

So girl of my dreams? What happened to you? You, from the 30s, and 40s and 50s, you were once beautiful, but you've become fat, with bags under your eyes, you chew gum to keep bad breath away; the juice dribbles down your double chin, you're still chewing, you lean close to my ear and you say: "SO! YOU'RE IN THE MARCHIN' BAND, HUH?"

Camaradarie: Dirty jokes, That's what does it. 182 Marching Men of Michigan tell dirty jokes all the way to, and all the way from the away games although rumor has it that there'll be a stop put to that, when people such as Cavender and other officials of the band will be stationed in each of the six buses.

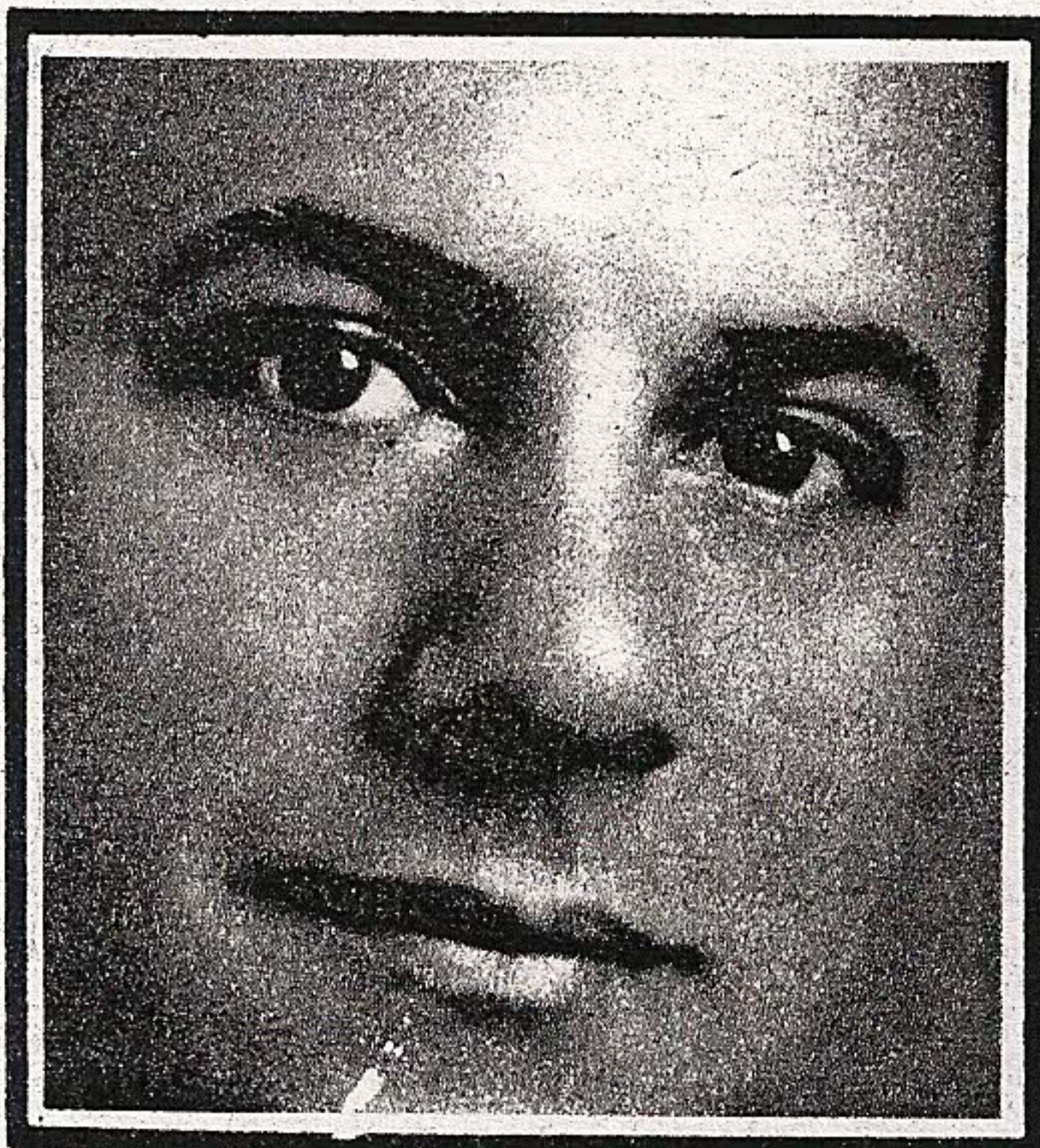
Camaradarie: I know I thought Michigan was the finest band in the land, with the finest music, finest arrangements, finest dance routines and so what if we were still in the 40s? Wasn't it the same as trains? Hardly anyone rides them, but aren't they a part of the American Heritage?

"I see a lot of kids on campus with long hair," Revelli once sermonized. "I don't want any long hair in this band. And if you ask me, anyone with long hair is a fairy!" *Shuffle shuffle shuffle CHEER!* American Hairitage!

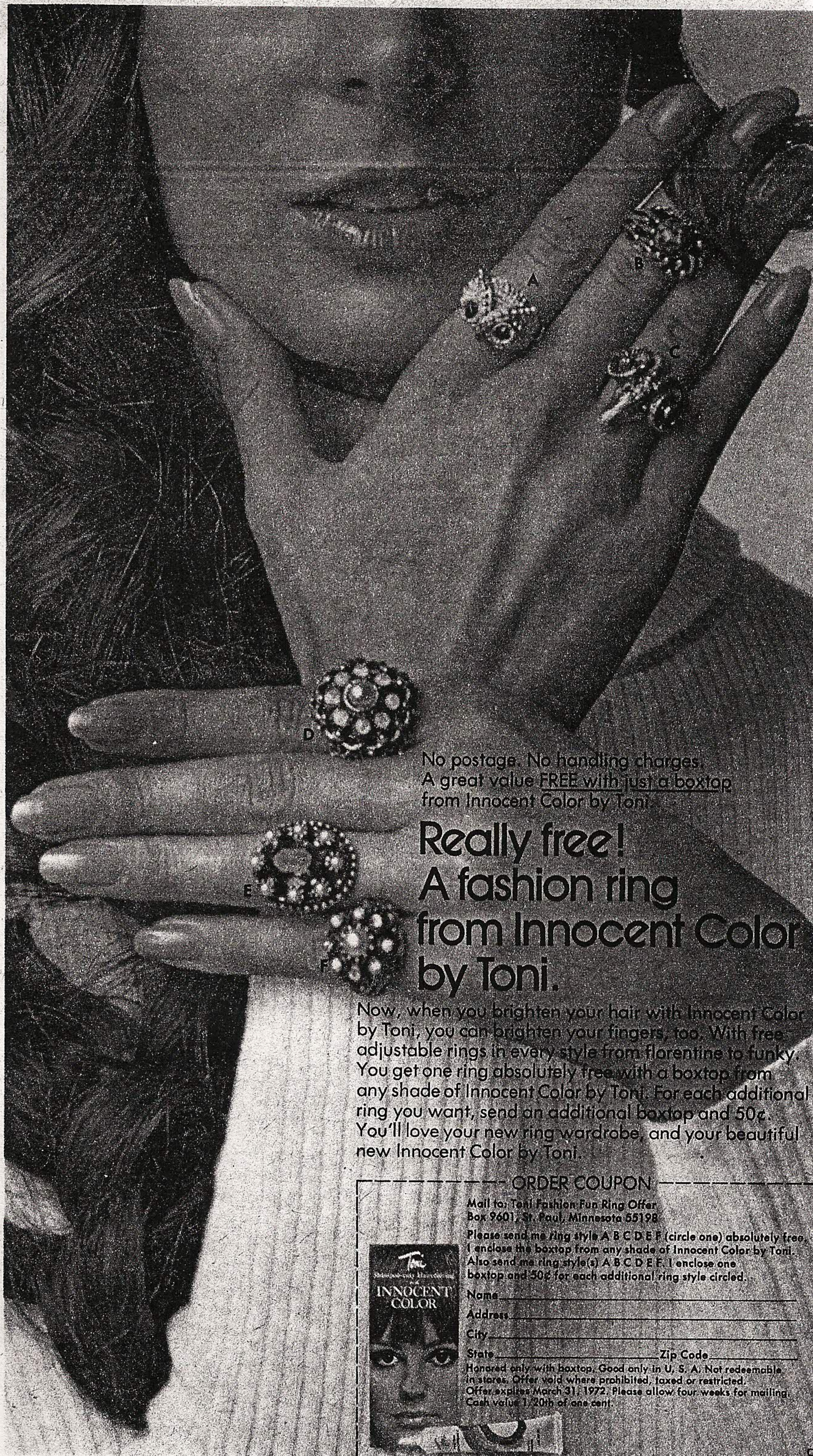
"The band just isn't with it," say the elitists. "I mean I just don't like military things." Long hair. It does it every time. Revelli was right, I guess.

ONE YEAR LATER I joined the band again, and couldn't wait for the Old Men to stand so this time I could boo the freshmen, but something was different. I saw 182 kids, no men, shuffling their feet and making cheering noises, and really yokking it up for Old Michigan. My hair was long, that's true, I had

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William D. Revelli (Circa 1944)



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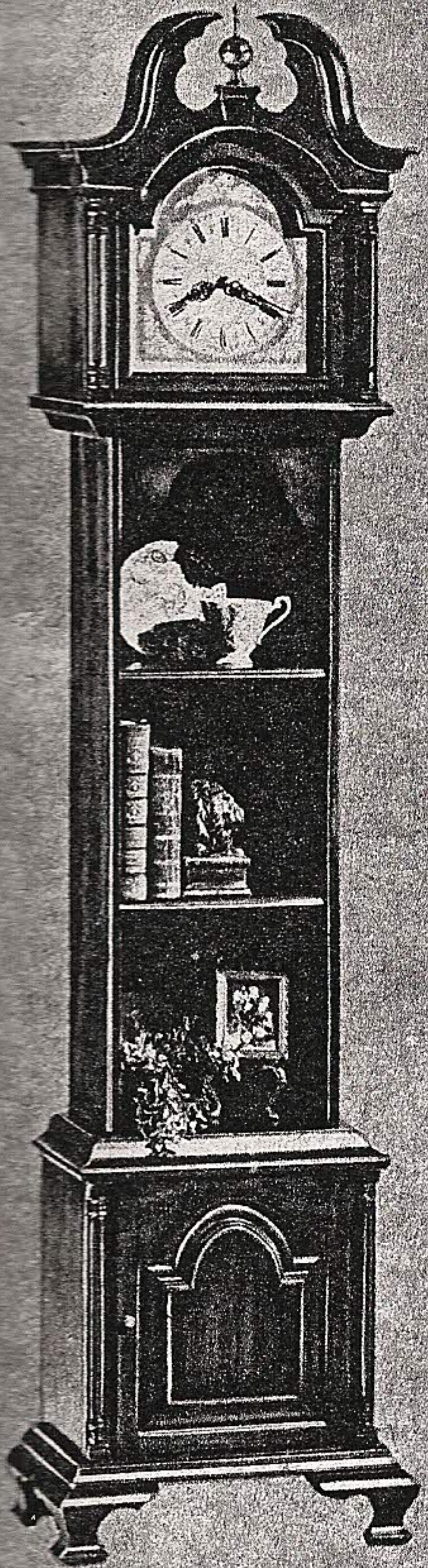
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"... the poor stoned-out hippies, the elitists, well they tried to dig it, but they laughed instead, and I tried to dig it but I felt no personal satisfaction after the show was over. It was time to leave."

Continued

a girl friend who didn't chew gum, and didn't like marching bands, and I couldn't get into the old camaraderie of the Michigan Marching Band.

Michigan State game, my sophomore year. Michigan State game, and we're better than the State band, aren't we? "YEAH!" Just ask 1950 and 1940 girls of my dreams about that.

But me! What happened to me? Michigan State game, sophomore year, half-time. *Tweet tweet tweet tweet, READY (two three) LIFT rum tum tummy tummy* "AND NOW FOR YOUR HALFTIME ENTERTAINMENT: THE MICHIGAN MARCHING BAND". My long hair started to get in my face. *Rum tum tummy tummy tum tum.* "HIPPIES! YIPPIES, CALL THEM WHAT YOU WILL, THE BEATLES CHANGED THE WORLD. AND TODAY, THE MICHIGAN MARCHING BAND SALUTES THE BEATLES."

And we did. In wonderful Michigan Band military arrangements, the Beatles' best: "When I'm 64," "Yesterday" and the poor stoned-out hippies in the crowd, the elitists, well they *tried* to dig it, but they laughed instead, and I tried to dig it, but throughout the "When I'm 64" dance routine, I kept seeing Cavender's leathery face getting more leathery and I didn't feel any more of a man than I already was; I felt no personal satisfaction after the show was over; I felt it was time to leave.

The next Monday, George B. Cavender and Dick Follet, drum major, were standing on the newly

paved asphalt drill field when I came up to them before practice began.

"What can I do for you, Barry?" George asked. He knows my name, I thought.

"Well, sir, uh." His head cocked a tiny bit, and he smiled; a spirited smile. The smile that read us a letter from an ex-bandsman who was serving in Vietnam, praising the Marching Band for helping his morale in the U.S. Armed Forces, how it helped him become a better fighter; a better man. The band cheered when they heard the letter and they marched their hearts out.

His leathery eyes looked up at mine. He squinted. He always squinted. It helped him to see if the band lines were straight or not.

"Well, sir, I've decided I want to leave the band."

His smile drooped and his forehead wrinkled. "Why, Barry, you've been a regular spark out there in the 13th rank." It was true. Sophomore year I was able to march and play at the same time. "Don't you enjoy it? Is it school?"

I looked at this sweet man, who had devoted more than fifteen years to assisting Revelli direct the marching band, whose brilliant dance routines and marching patterns pleased the crowds, and pleased the 1950 and 1940 girls of my dreams and made them happy. How could I tell this devoted man that I had outgrown something that in his eyes could never be outgrown? That the traditions and shows of the band were someone else's ideas and genius and perfection, not mine; that I was just a puppet, a sol-

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'The neck breakingly fast cadence' as the Michigan Marching Band roars out of the tunnel / Photographed by TONY SPINA.

Newest
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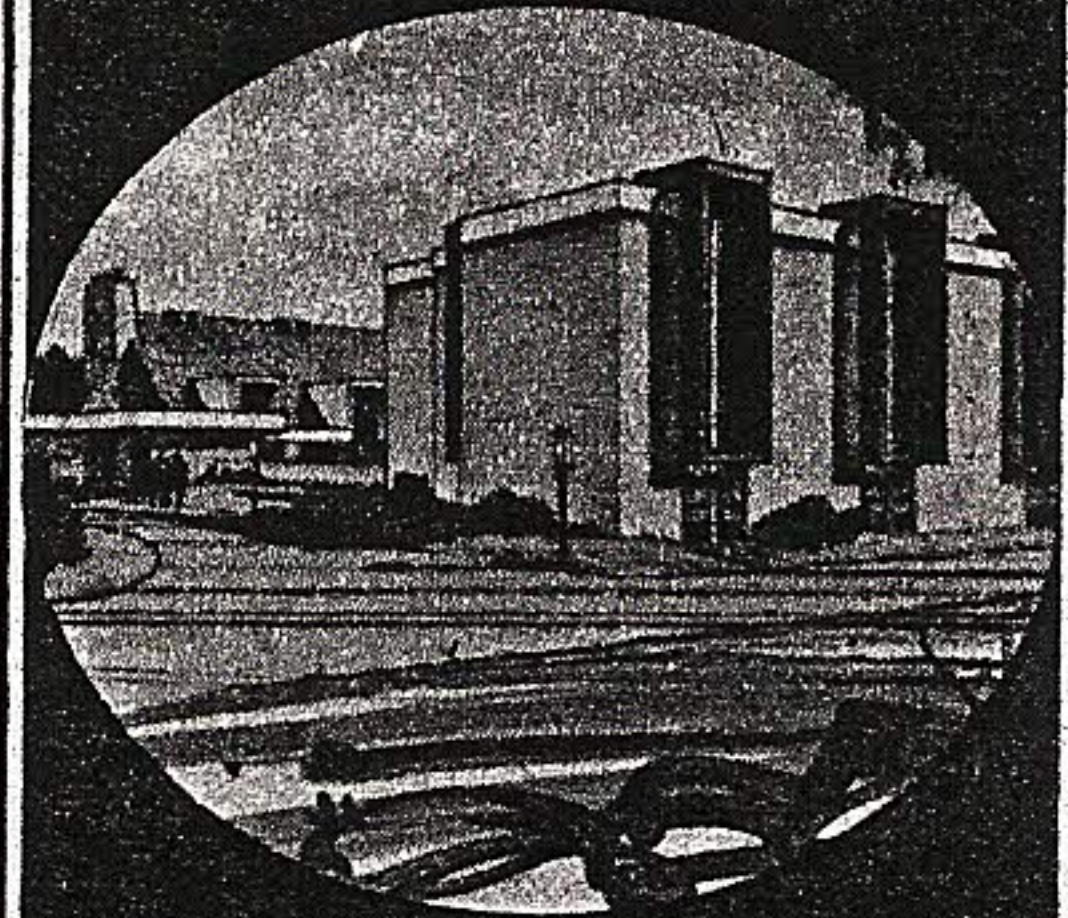


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Detroit Free Press, October 24, 1971



MEN
TAKE
NOTE

SHEER
NYLON

"... Of course they marched blind for only five yards and opened their eyes the rest of the way except for one guy who walked into a fence..."

Continued

dier, carrying out orders for the benefit of a crowd halfway on their way to death; the 1940 girls of my dreams?

"It's school," I said.

"Oh." He closed his eyes for a second. "Why don't you think about it? You know, we have a chance of going to the Rose Bowl this year."


"Yes, I know," I said. The bandsman's greatest dream: to march on Rose Bowl Turf. "But school..."

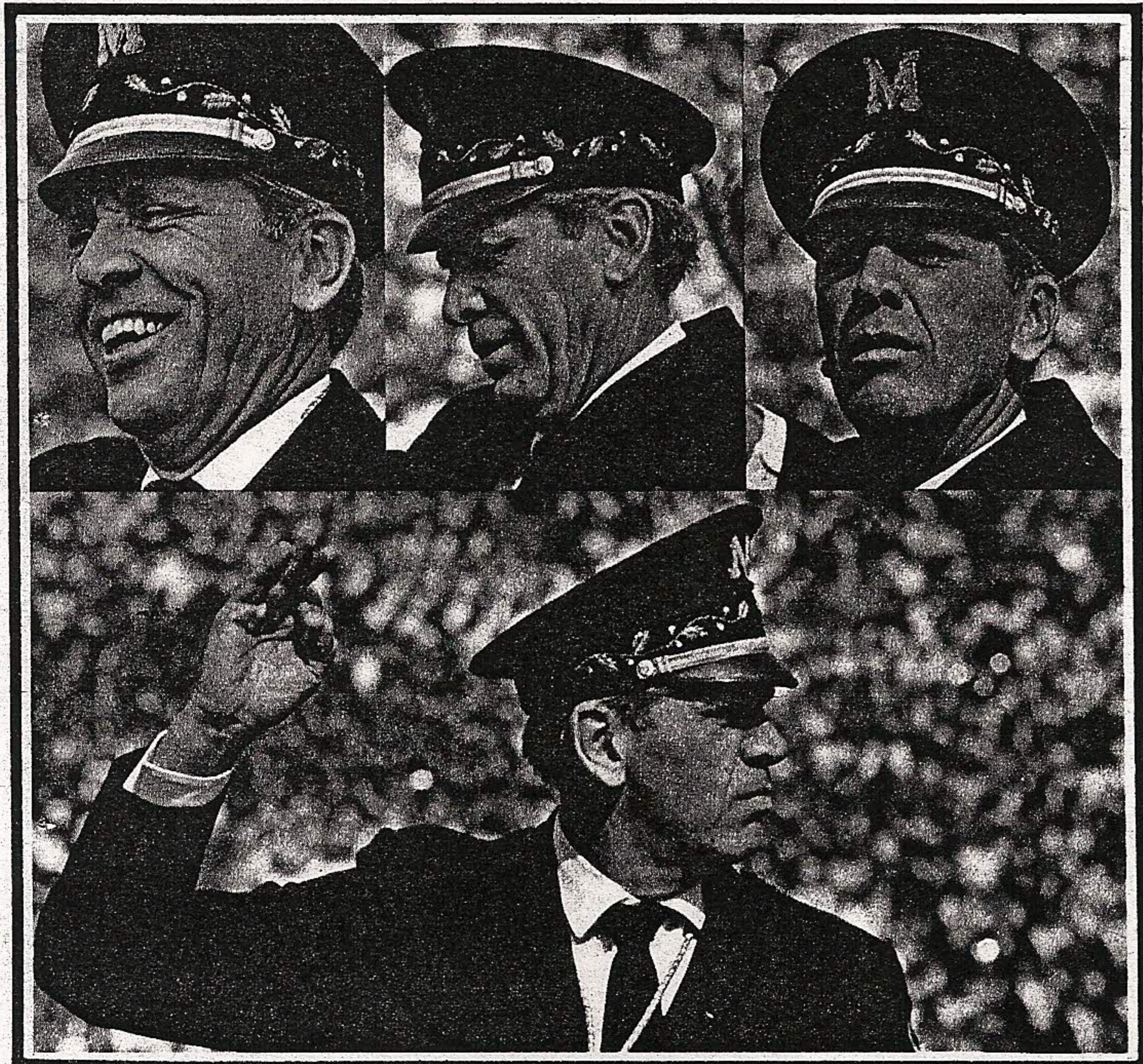
"OK. You think about it." I walked away and he went back to Dick Follet, and I quit the band. They didn't make it to the Rose Bowl. That was the next year. But Revelli, I'm told became ever so much more unpredictable.

You-men can't march," he shouted at the Marching Band last year. "Why, I know of a blind bandsman in the Illinois Band, who not only could march better than you, but he was a rank leader. Let's see you do that. Here, this rank. Shut your eyes, and march twenty yards, and we'll see how good you are." Of course they marched blind for only five yards and opened their eyes the rest of the way, except for one guy who walked into a fence.

"What the hell is the matter with you? Call yourself a bandsman? You should be ashamed!"

Revelli is retired now. Cavender is now the director. The band is getting closer to the "now" sound as they know it, and people still cheer when the band comes gushing out of the tunnel onto the artificial turf, and **The Victors** still brings tears to Cavender's eyes, so that he stops it mid-play during first rehearsal and says "There's something about a marching band. Power; guts; intestinal fortitude!"

But Revelli will sit on the sidelines this year; oh in an honored seat to be sure, probably with the marching band. They'll *shuffle* their feet at the mention of Revelli's name; funny stories will be told about good old Dr. Revelli. Cavender's face will get more leathery. And the 1950, and 1940 and even 1937 girls will cheer and cry and yell for the **FIN-EST** band in the land; and point at the long haired fairies sitting in the stands, and beat their feet to the *tweet tweet tweet tweet ready* (two three) **LIFT rum tum** of the finest drums in the land, and we're proud as can be of the American scene, precise and clean Marching Men of Michigan, fighting heroes in Vietnam, long haired dropouts in San Francisco; we all take good care of our uniforms, all of us **MEN**: chest out a little further, head up a little higher. We always watch the halftime shows on television, my wife and I. She chews gum, but I'm proud. Aren't you? 



George B. Cavender, directing the Men of Michigan/Photography by TONY SPINA

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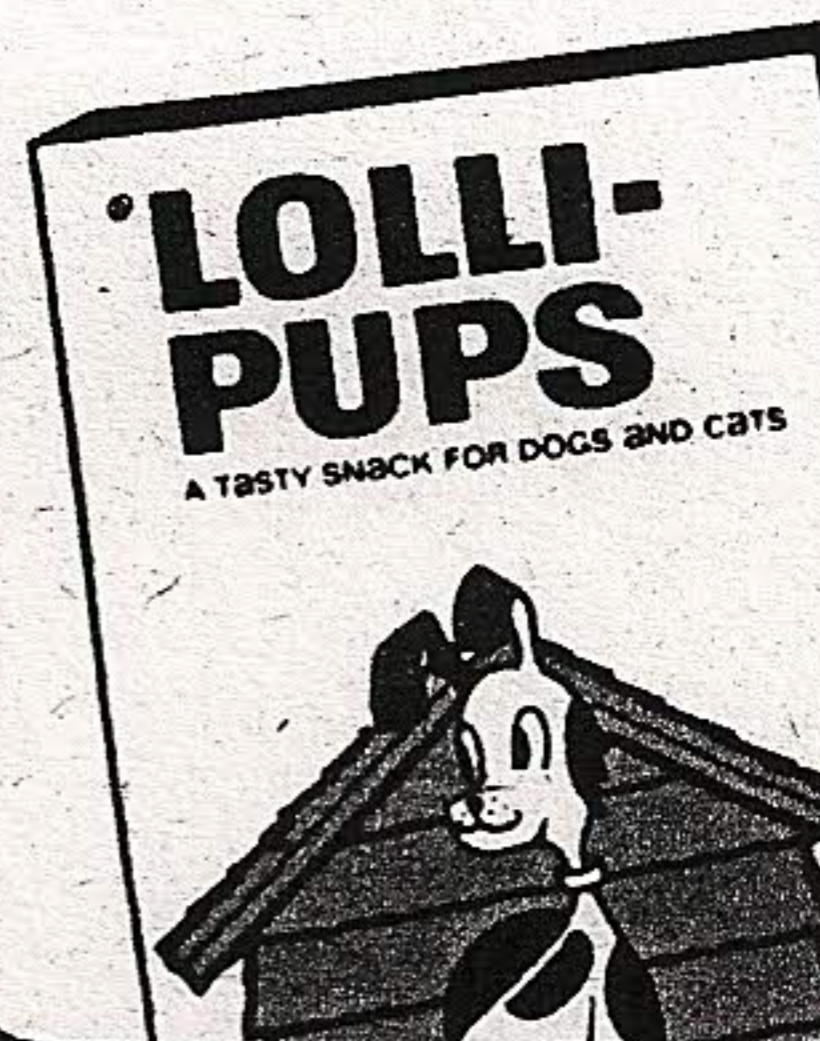
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