

HALFTIME

UNC bands play for 'Major'

By KIMBERLY L. MARION
Special to the DTH

For 16 years, he led the U.S. Air Force Band before royalty and heads of state. He served all the presidents from Roosevelt through Nixon and played before Queen Elizabeth, King Saud of Arabia, Premier Nikita Khrushchev, secretaries of state and various other dignitaries.

But for the last 18 years, Major John F. Yesulaitis has been the creative force behind the UNC bands. "The Major has seen everything and done everything in life and still has a great capacity for living," said Allen Reep, assistant director for the UNC bands.

The 66-year-old "Major Y," as he is called on campus, agreed that he has had a varied career that has taught him many lessons — the most important, how to live each day with enthusiasm, excitement and laughter.

"You have to learn how to laugh," Yesulaitis said. "Sometimes people are too serious. They take life too seriously, and if you don't know how to laugh, life can be very, very drab."

Yesulaitis began his military career in 1936 as a French hornist with the U.S. Army Band in Washington.

In 1947, he became the associate conductor of the U.S. Air Force Band and the Symphony Orchestra in Washington, entertaining White House families and their guests.

Although he was accustomed to seeing royalty and dignitaries, he said he once embarrassed himself while playing for the Queen (now the Queen Mother) and King George. When he shook the Queen's hand, he removed his hat, which is part of the military uniform that is not to be removed.

During his reign as associate conductor of the Air Force Band, he also had the opportunity to travel to Europe, Africa, Iceland, Scandinavia, China, Haiti, Bermuda, Mexico, Canada and the Philippines. He lived in Japan and Korea for a year each.

He said his musical highlight was during one of these many trips when he conducted a band in Berlin Olympic Stadium before an audience of 125,000 — his largest ever.

Shortly before his military career ended, Yesulaitis was married. In 1964, he and his wife, Patricia, moved to North Carolina, where he took a stationary job as the band director at UNC.

Before Yesulaitis came to UNC, the band was called the "Meandering Tar Heels," Reep said. Band membership has almost tripled since Yesulaitis' arrival.

One reason for the increase is Yesulaitis' ability to

stay calm in stressful situations. He said that conductors, like actors, must develop a "who cares?" attitude so they can keep from being embarrassed or frustrated much of the time.

"The Major never gets uptight about performances," said band member Alyson Reid.

Eleni Bacas added, "He's not like a real major, 'hupt-two'. He is extremely patient and understanding."

When asked about his patience, Yesulaitis responded, "I am sure there are times when I portray that image. I try to stay calm, but there are times when I get excited. However, if I show stress, it creates a big problem (with the band), so I have to keep my wits about me."

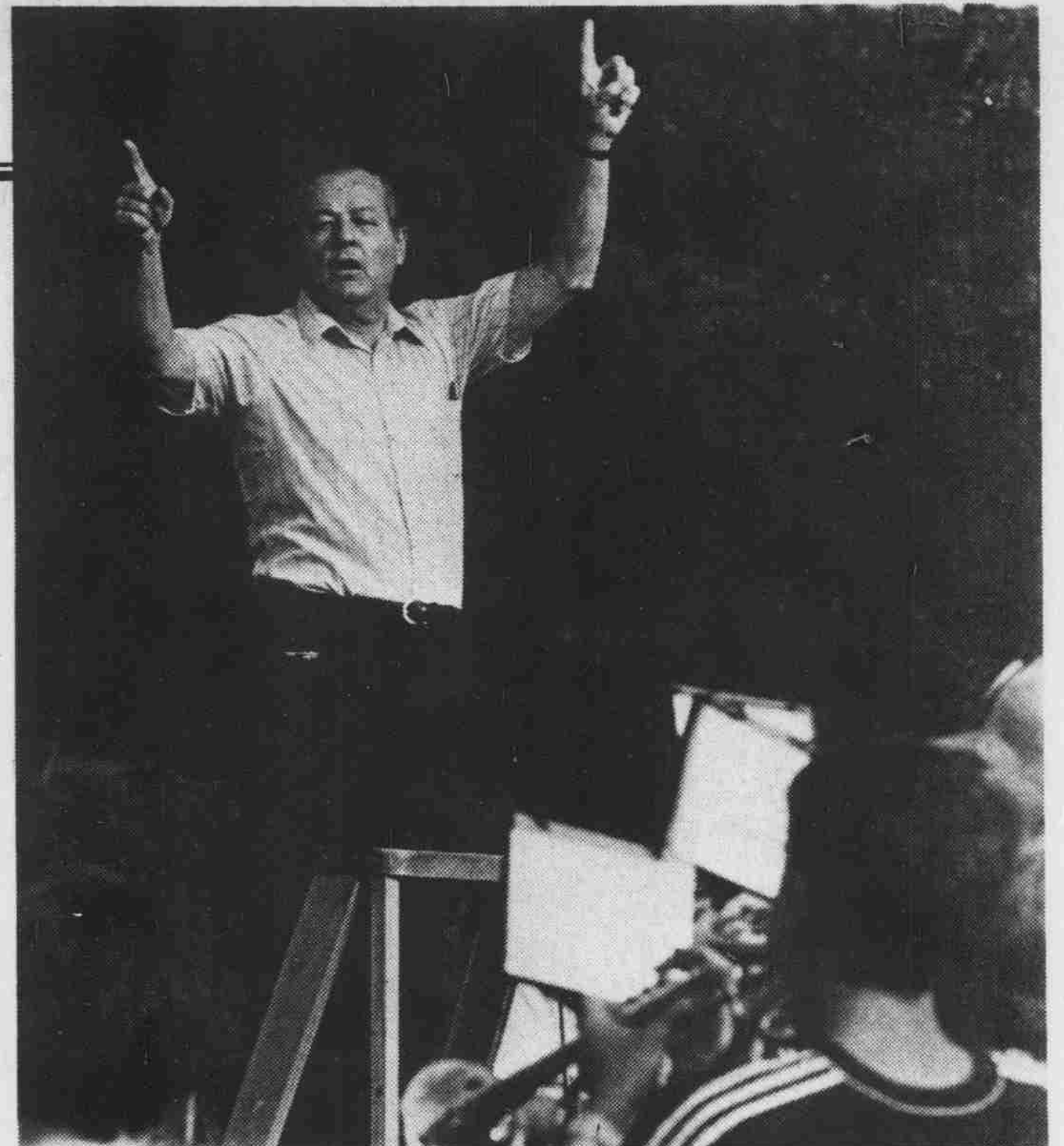
Yet to many people, including Reep, Yesulaitis is an "ultimate father figure."

"He really cares about people. He is forever calling us (the band) his family," Reep added.

Yesulaitis agreed that he has a big family. "All of my people in the band know that any time they have a problem, they can come to see me and I'll listen to them. I don't know if I can help, but I'll listen."

The family feeling contributes pride to the band organization, creating a little extra effort by the members because they are working as one unit, Yesulaitis said.

In addition to being a "father figure" for the



Major John F. Yesulaitis, "Major Y," directs the Marching Tar Heels. Before his 18 years leading UNC bands, he conducted before world leaders.

band, he is also supportive of the University and its athletic teams. On his office bulletin board, he has posted the schedules for almost every UNC athletic event.

"He's the teams' best cheerleader," Reep said. "You can't find anyone in the University community who hasn't been touched by the Major. Everybody knows him. He's our own best ambassador."

During the marching band season, Yesulaitis is in charge of choosing the music for and designing and charting the halftime shows, which take about eight hours a week to prepare.

Yesulaitis also conducts the playing rehearsals, which take another 12 hours a week.

After football season, he conducts two pep bands and a concert band.

Although Yesulaitis does delegate some responsibilities to the band officers and Reep, he usually operates the band himself.

And during his years at UNC, he has done more than just create a name for the band — he has made history himself.

In 1975, Yesulaitis was named one of the top 10 most outstanding musical directors in the United States and Canada by *The School Musician Directors and Teacher* magazine.

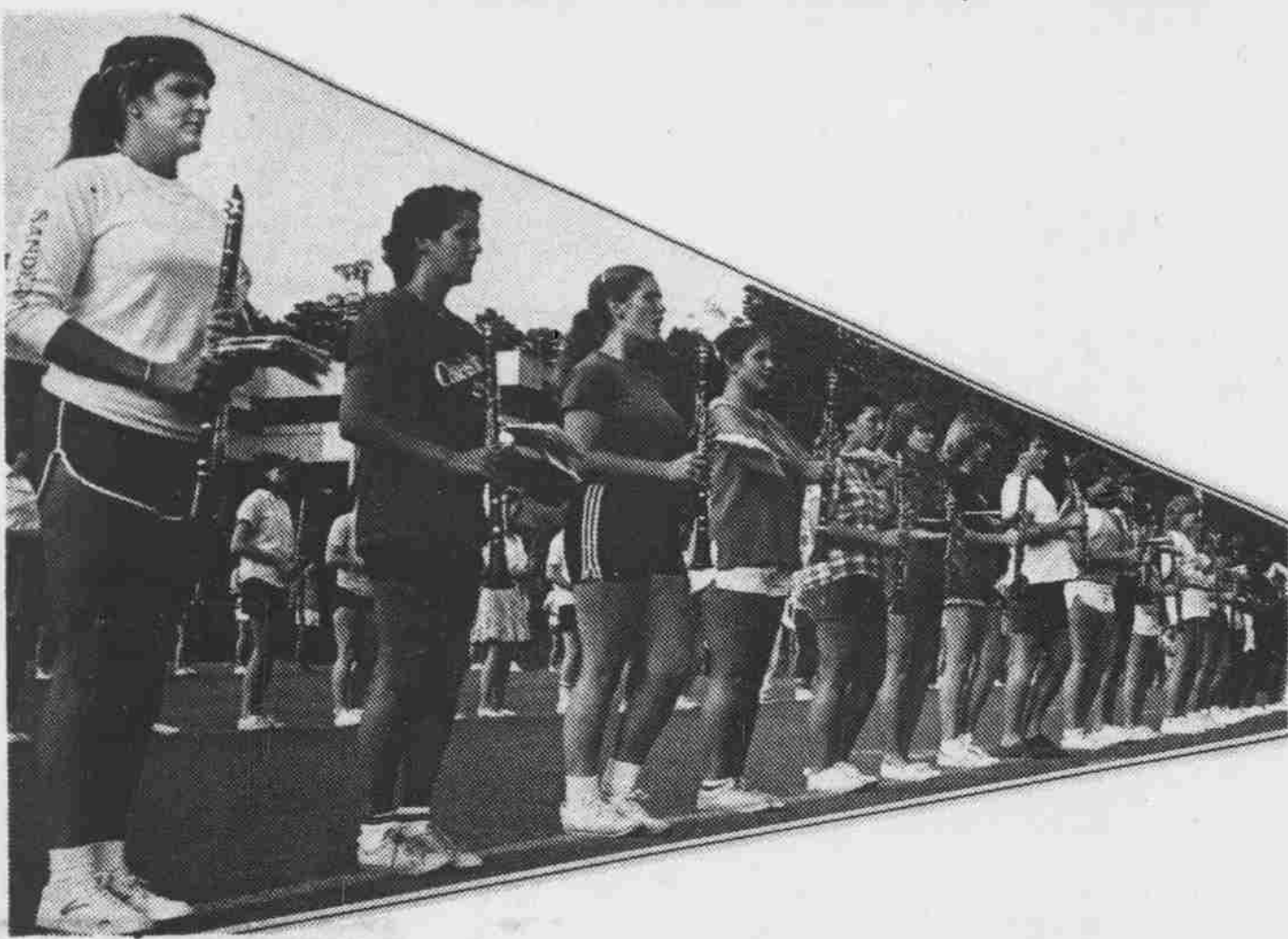
In 1976, Yesulaitis became president of the American Bandmasters Association, which in Reep's opinion is the most prestigious group in the world. After a four-year term, he became a member of the board of directors.

When conducting doesn't occupy Yesulaitis' time, he enjoys relaxing at his mountain home and visiting people.

"Relationships are important to me and the band. If I can do something for someone, I will go out of my way to do it as a matter of friendship more than anything else," he said.

While Yesulaitis said he has accomplished and seen almost everything he cares to see, he does not plan to retire any time soon.

"My goal is to be happy in what I am doing, as long as I can do something," he said. "I don't care to burn up the world or anything like that."



First band camp offers more than sounding the trumpets

By JO ELLEN MEEKINS
Staff Writer

What causes a person to move to school a week early in order to march in 105-degree weather?

I seriously wondered myself as I trudged up the dorm steps on Aug. 17 juggling cardboard boxes and one small black clarinet case. The next day, more than 100 freshmen would arrive on campus to become members of the "Band of Champions." Their initiation: the first annual Marching Tar Heel Band Camp. Their initiators: returning Tar Heel band members like me.

On the eve of the freshmen's arrival, band staff and officers held a cookout at the home of the assistant band director, Allen Reep, to discuss the goals of the camp. The group proposed the idea of band camp last May during the Band-Cheerleader Planning Retreat at Ocean Isle Beach.

"Every other major college band has band camp," Band President David Bagnal said. "It gives us a head start and some concentrated rehearsal time."

After we moved freshmen into their dorms on Thursday morning, it was off to Hill Hall for a music rehearsal. Allen Reep introduced Major John F. Yesulaitis, the band director, as well as the large group of staff and officers who make the band run smoothly. Afterward, band librarians Liz Kelly and Dana Steed passed out music folders, and official rehearsal began.

"The week after graduation last May, we began sorting music for the fall," Steed said. "We've been working all summer, and about a month ago we began putting all the music for marching season into 270 new band folders."

After only a couple of hours of rehearsal, freshmen quickly became familiar

with UNC favorites such as "Here Comes Carolina" and the "Tag," our nickname for the ending of "Hark the Sound."

Although our schedule was very busy, it left plenty of time for work and play.

"When we work, we work hard, and when we play, we play hard," Reep said. "Both are important, but they need to be separate." Our social activities for the day began with "get to know" exercises as 200 of us poured onto the lawn in front of Hill Hall.

"Band camp at the University of Illinois was during new-student week, (one week before classes started)," said Cliff Massie, junior transfer and alto sax player. "We practiced eight to 10 hours a day for five days in a row. There were no water breaks, little time for meeting people or socializing, but no shortage of time when it came to marching."

"UNC provided a welcome relief to all this. Here, band camp offered me the opportunity to meet people and get involved through organized social events, as well as during band."

After acquainting ourselves with each other through such games as "Skin the Snake" and "Lap Sits," we crossed the campus en masse to the Pine Room, where we were treated to dinner by University Dining Services. The last of the day's activities was "Band Movie Night" at the Ram Triple Theater, with band members receiving a special discount.

For the remainder of the weekend, we practiced potential halftime show music in the morning at Hill Hall, and we practiced marching on Ehringhaus and Navy fields in the hot afternoons. As my roommate and I left our room to head for Navy Field on Saturday, the radio announced, "Currently, we have 99 degrees in the Triangle with an expected high of 102." I thought I saw steam rising off the Astroturf.

"Band! Attention!"
"GO HEELS!"
"Mark-time-march . . . Forward march and left . . . left . . ."

With the help of Gatorade, we managed to survive the intense heat. Once again I wondered why we all were willing to "grin and bear it," but I knew that soon all the hard work would really pay off.

At 6 p.m. Saturday we all gathered at Ehringhaus Field for the band pig-pickin'. Also in attendance were Chancellor Christopher C. Fordham III and his family; Dean Donald Boulton and his wife, Marilyn; Assistant Dean of Student Affairs Sharon Mitchell; and several members of the varsity cheerleading squad.

Our leisure time was made even better with the knowledge that we had accomplished our goal to have fun while learning and working hard. "Everything went very well," Bagnal said. "It was hard work, but we were all out there together."

"My ultimate goal was to be in the Carolina Band," said Chris Allman, a freshman tuba player. "It's hard because everything was different in high school, and you have to learn everything all over again. But you know that to get things done you have to show up and do your job."

"It's work, but it's enjoyable," said Allison Smoak, a percussionist and the band's secretary. "We've been working since June writing percussion solos. We write most of our own cadences. But we have a good time — most of my friends are in the band. When you work hard at something and you know you've done it well, you have a real sense of accomplishment."



Members of the UNC Marching Band practice routines in preparation for the fall football season. Band members returned early to Chapel Hill and braved temperatures over 100 degrees.
Staff photos by Jeff Neuville

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