

Melville AFA Brass Inc., as it is now known, began towards the end of WWII under the name Volunteer Defence Corp. Band (VDC). The [VDC](#) was formed in 1940 and was a kind of Australian Home Guard, paramilitary in nature, run by the government and the RSL and composed of volunteers. The Band formed in 1944 and since then has also been known as Nedlands Band, Subiaco Municipal Band, Winterbottom Motor Company Band, Air Force Association Band and now under its current title.

The band incorporated on 14th February 2002 as Melville AFA Brass Inc. but was known by this title long before that. It is hard to pinpoint the date on which the current name was first introduced but from the records it would appear to be the mid 1990's.

The band has a long history with the Royal Australian Air Force Association. For over 20 years the band led the Air Force Association Anzac Day parade but sadly had to call it a day owing to ageing members. Nearly all Brass Bands today face this common problem of aging membership and find it difficult recruiting young players. We are no different but do currently boast a membership ranging in age from 14 to 90.

During the 1950's the band was domiciled in Adelaide Terrace but the then President, Mr. Lance Howard, negotiated with RAAFA at Bull Creek to formalize and form the Association Band. The band built its own band hall on the Bull Creek estate back in the 60's and on 17th January 1984 signed a Charter with RAAFA that encompassed the agreement between the parties. Owing to plans to expand the complex at Bull Creek the band on 7th May 2008 vacated their bandroom to make way. They are now located at the Southern Districts Senior Citizens Centre on the corner of North Lake Road and Archibald Streets in Willagee.

Regrettably there is little information available about the earlier years of the band except from current members who have been around a while and who have provided useful tidbits of their memories over the years. The AGM minutes kept on file contain reports, dating from 1991 onwards, that also provide some interesting reviews of the events during the years since.

During the fifties, sixties and into the seventies the band was conducted by Ivan Nylander (then lead trumpet player with the WA. Symphony Orchestra) and enjoyed many concert successes. The band won various state titles and in 1959 the band won the National B Grade Championship. After Ivan retired as Musical Director, John Perry took over the job and made the transition to a training band. During John Perry's time with the Band they went on no less than six extended overseas tours, with major performances in Honk Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Butterworth RAAF Base, Penang, Pattaya, Manila and Singapore.

As Australia's economy tightened towards the end of the eighties, overseas tours were no longer viable, so the AFA Band confined its activities to the local scene and unfortunately started to stagnate in the mid nineties. The first step to rectify this was with a name change to the Melville AFA Brass Band, which more closely identified the area of activity. In 1998 Richard Read (Ex.CCBB trombone and Musical Director) took the helm and with natural enthusiasm and

arranging ability, introduced new music which fostered growth in player numbers. The new music, new players and new uniforms saw the band again enjoying popularity with audiences.

A wealth of talent has served in the band over the years, names like Bernie Coalan - Trombone, John Stirling - Euphonium, Jack Weston - Trombone, Kevin Johnson - Cornet, Reg Harewood - Trombone, Elmor Nylander - Cornet and current player Ray Taylor - Cornet. Both Elmor and Ray have had long careers in swing

bands performing at the Embassy Ballroom and also with artists like Nat King Cole, Ertha Kitt, and the stage band for Louis Armstrong show and other major bands.

Other activities in which the band has been involved over the years include gigs with WA Turf Club, Fairbridge Anzac Parade, Cleos Hotel, Attwell Galleries, Rottnest Island Festival, York Jazz Festival, Pinjarra "Edenvale", Mandurah Arts Festival, Gosnells Twilight Concert, Gosnells Heritage Celebration, Hotham Valley Railway, Quairading Agricultural Society, Leeming Bowling Club and of course concerts & fetes at RAAFA Bull Creek. The band has also undertaken numerous local country tours playing concerts in the likes of Busselton, Margaret River plus many towns throughout the wheatbelt.

Membership

We have 22 active members on our register at present and usually have around 15 or so at rehearsal on each Monday night. The playing group consists of all unpaid amateurs from a broad spectrum within the community. There is no age restriction or minimum playing standard and all prospective members are welcome to attend one of our rehearsals and join in. We do charge an annual subscription which is very affordable and helps provide each member with an instrument, uniform and other ancillary equipment.

Repertoire

The band has a music library currently consisting of 1285 titles covering a wealth of styles ranging from Bach to the Beatles including the usual marches from yesteryear to the more modern day music from the many musicals and dance styles. The list is always being expanded as funds allow and is available on request for anyone contemplating organising an event. Please log onto our website at www.afabrass.org.au and contact our President providing your contact details. The list can be emailed to you.

Contesting

Although the band performs in local festivals today, it no longer contests. That is not to say it hasn't been a force to reckon with in the past or indeed at some point again in the future. As mentioned earlier, we won the National B Grade Championship back in 1959 and in more recent times won the State C Grade title in 2003 under the baton of Mr. Paul De Cinque. Paul was awarded a scholarship to Churchlands Senior High School and graduated in 1999 as the top Trumpet player in year 12 in Western Australia. He is currently a member of the Royal Agricultural Society of WA Brass Band and an active WABBA committee member. Our current Music Director is Mr. Steven Harmer, a young but very enthusiastic educator working with young musicians within the WA education department. Steve has been responsible for bringing our recent batch of youngsters into the fold. Without them our average age would be

considerably higher than it is and so we are very grateful to Steve for his leadership and commitment.

Ceremonial Bugle Calls

On many occasions the band has provided RAAFA with a bugler for ceremonies and commemorations. This is an on-going privilege for the band to be able to contribute something back to our major sponsor.

Sponsorship

We are very appreciative to RAAFA Bull Creek for their on-going sponsorship of the band. Without this the band could not continue. We have only one paid position in our organisation and that is our Music Director. The sponsorship provided by RAAFA goes a long way to securing his services with the balance having to be provided from our fund raising activities. We are always seeking work from anywhere possible to provide new music, replacement instruments and equipment and to provide for the future. We continue to look for assistance from the many Grants that are available but are frustrated in these efforts due to no Public Liability insurance. This is a prerequisite for many Grant applications and therefore we would welcome any sponsor willing to provide this cover for us.

Outlook

The committee is conscious of the pressure to find funding avenues. To attract interest in the band a program of 'Performances-In-The-Park' has been introduced whereby a series of performances are planned over the warmer months in the local parks within the city of Melville. These will be free to the general public and aimed at show casing the band in an effort to demonstrate how a Brass Band can play more than the expected march or two. We hope that the City Of Melville Council can help in publicising each event on their website and other outlets. If we can attract a wider audience we hope to appeal to the younger people among us who might be looking towards a musical experience they won't regret.