

Fighting for the Lord

Just three years after The Salvation Army had opened fire in Denmark, a Danish Staff Band was established in 1890. Here Niels Silfverberg traces some of the highlights of the band's journey before its disbandment in 1932.

After its establishment in 1890, the Danish Staff Band's tasks were to be a model for Salvation Army bands across the country to develop up-and-coming local leaders, to create public interest for the Army and morally boost the small fighting forces in the local corps that had tried so hard to establish strongholds in Denmark. The band would be travelling musical evangelists and would in time almost become a mobile training college for officers. Many of the members would later become very influential figures in the Army in all parts of the world. One of these, from the band's early years, was Emil Marcussen. He would later be knighted, but served most of his career in the USA and would in his retirement work as the Army's prison chaplain at Folsom and San Quentin. Other band members would influence the Army's banding, such as Erik Leidzén and Emil Söderström, and others had been or would become bandmasters of staff bands in places like Czechoslovakia, Germany, Finland and Argentina. Again, others had served in other staff bands – like Alfred Benwell, who had been a member of the Junior Staff Band in London – the predecessor to the ISB.

The first bandmaster was George Stagg – an English officer who had been assigned to the Danish Territory as Music Instructor. The band consisted initially of six players and only Stagg and the band's euphonium player – who like Stagg was an excellent musician – knew how to play a brass instrument before they signed up. This would change over the years and it would become a most capable, popular and highly respected band of excellent musicians.

The band's premier task was assisting General William Booth when he visited Denmark in February 1891. It would later accompany him on several occasions. In the early years, its activities were characterised by short-term planning and chance. During its first tour, in April 1891, the band was met by a Swedish officer, Vilhelm Fahlesohn, bringing a letter to bandmaster Stagg telling him to report to THQ immediately for a new assignment in Australia. Fahlesohn took over the leadership of the band the same day. Later, bandmasters like Ernst Söderström turned the band into a highly organised and well trained force.

In the band's early years, it travelled throughout Denmark, marching from town to town, travelling on horse-drawn



The Danish Staff Band in 1891. This picture was taken the day Bandmaster George Stagg was replaced by Vilhelm Fahlesohn.

carriages, sailing on small boats or getting around in whatever way possible. This was not always easy, as an episode from 1893 bears witness to. The band was due to travel between two coastal towns, Assens and Kolding. It left Assens at 7.00am on a small, open sail boat, which was only able to carry the band and its luggage and very little else. The sky was dark and there was a strong breeze and not long into the trip, this became a storm as high waves splashed over the band members. In particular, the two young boys in the band became very seasick and their childish joy at being on

open seas completely disappeared. All sails had to be furled. When the ship was off the coast of Schleswig (Germany), the weather worsened. The ship threatened to capsize at any moment and the band members constantly had to scoop water over the railing. The ship could not be turned around and their fear became so intense that any seasickness disappeared, but they were all ready to meet God. Calm water was reached and at 3.00pm the ship arrived at the locks on the Danish-German border, some 20 km south of the targeted destination. The water was dripping off the soaked band members, all the instrument cases and suitcases were filled with sea water and some gear, including caps, had been lost to the sea. A local tavern was found and the band got a cup of warm coffee. Only armed with their instruments, they began the long march to Kolding. The march in the heavy storm had almost dried their clothes when they reached their destination for a very late meeting. It is clearly understandable why band members needed to be in good health!

Right after the turn of the century another policy, that band members could play a non-brass instrument, was initiated. This was to diversify programmes, making it easier to connect with people. During the band's existence, music on stringed instruments, concertinas and even on occasion sitars or water glasses was featured and the repertoire would even consist of classical transcriptions as well as 'salon' and popular music. One of the band's hallmarks would



The band in 1907. Erik Leidzén is pictured on the far right.



The band in 1913. Ernst Söderström is pictured second from left.

be creating innovative programmes that gave opportunity for connecting with the congregations, as well as meetings and concerts especially for children. The band always had personal testimonies as a central point in its concerts.

The creativity in ways to spread the gospel was shown on many occasions. One of the more extraordinary was when the band visited a town in Sweden with a large mine. Several of the miners were Salvationists, so

the band wanted to hold a meeting at the mine. This was rejected by the owner, who did not want to bring up all the miners, so the band offered to go down into the mine and hold a meeting in the mine shafts. Probably taken by surprise, this was accepted, and the band went down into the mine. One can only wonder about the acoustics!

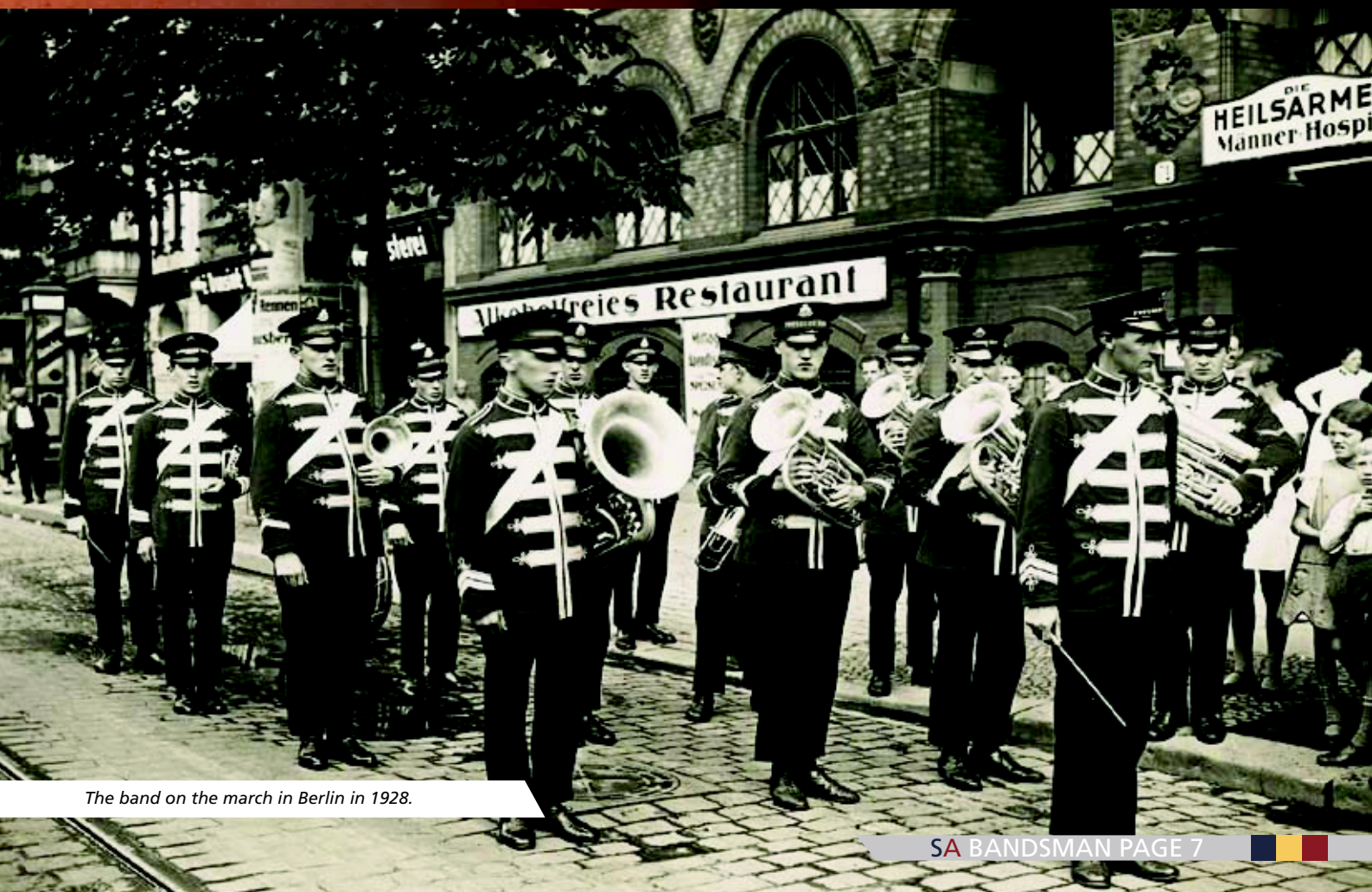
In the 1920s, the band entered its finest period. Although only numbering 14

players, the repertoire featured music by Leidzén and Söderström but also pieces like *The King of Kings*, which was played on manuscript. The band travelled 11 out of 12 months in the year, seldom sleeping in the same bed two nights, if in a bed at all. They would visit the smallest corps but also play at venues like the Vaasa Church, Clapton Congress Hall and Regent Hall, as several months every year would involve campaigns in other countries.

The band's first international engagement had been as part of the Danish delegation at the 1914 International Congress. From 1924, it travelled frequently in Sweden with additional tours of Finland, but also undertaking tours of Estonia, Latvia, Germany and England, all places receiving high acclaim for their music and Christian example.

In 1932, when it was in its prime and just back from the victorious tour in England, the band was dissolved. The reason for this is unknown, but the history and example of this band still challenges us as Salvationists and Salvation Army band members in the 21st century.

Details extracted from a new book by Niels Silverberg entitled Fighting for the Lord, the title of which is taken from a march by Emil Söderström, which was a regular item on Danish Staff Band programmes. The book will be available later this year.



The band on the march in Berlin in 1928.