

Remarks to Redcoat Band Annual Banquet
Georgia Hall, Tate Student Center
November 27, 2005
By Tom Jackson

Being a part of a great institution is one of the most important things we can do in life – because institutions outlive us.

For 31 years, I have had an extraordinary vantage point to view the Redcoat Band pre-game and half-time shows. As I sit in the public address booth of Sanford Stadium and stadiums all over the southeastern U.S. watching the Redcoats perform, I usually am sitting side-by-side with the announcer for the other band performing before or after the Redcoats on that particular day. I must say that last night in Grant Field, sitting beside the Georgia Tech announcer, I never have been prouder to be associated with the Redcoat Band. You folks were extraordinary in your performance on the field and in your performance in the stands. And you were outstanding representatives of the University of Georgia.

I've been announcing for the Redcoats since well before most people in this room were born...and even since before both my own two sons were born – they're now 21 and 26. My wife and I celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary this past week, and that's a milestone I'm truly proud of and grateful for. But I've been announcing for the Redcoats since the year before we were married. Sherry is here with me tonight, and she has spent a whole lot of second quarters of football games sitting alone in the stands while I make my way to the stadium p-a booth.

The first game I announced for the Redcoats was the Tangerine Bowl in Orlando in 1974. We lost that game to Miami of Ohio, an inauspicious start to say the least. The regular Redcoat band announcer could not make the trip for some reason, and Roger Dancz asked me to fill in for just that one game. I've just been filling in ever since.

I've never really kept track, but in preparing my remarks tonight, I looked back over the schedules and over the years to realize I've been on 22 bowl trips with the Redcoats, another 91 out-of-town games on top of the bowl trips, 186 home games in Sanford Stadium, plus, after this week, three SEC Championship games. This week will be my 302nd game announcing for the Redcoats, and I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to be associated with

such a great organization over that period of time. That's a lot of Spell Georgia cheers. I don't think we've spelled it wrong yet.

There are many landmarks along the way. Perhaps you've heard of some of them, and perhaps some of my memories will be new information for you.

I have an old film of a 1970s show in which the Redcoats formed a large train on the field, complete with wheels that turned as the train moved goal line to goal line with steam coming out of the smokestack.

There's the infamous wedding show during which a couple was actually married on a large cake in the center of the Redcoat formation.

There was the James Brown show, in which the Godfather of Soul sang with the band for a halftime.

There was the visit of Prince Charles of England – Kentucky beat us 33-0 that day. As President Fred Davison escorted Prince Charles down the center of the field, walking from the bridge end toward the east end through the Redcoat formation, behind them on the bridge someone unfurled a large banner which everyone in the stadium could clearly see. It said, "Prince Charles does it Dawg style."

For some years, we had the electric squad with Steve Dancz and others set up on a platform in the middle of the band, with electric guitars, organ and a drum set.

There was the trip to Washington DC in January 1977 when the Redcoats were chosen to represent the state of Georgia at the inaugural parade of President Jimmy Carter. As the home state band of the new President, the Redcoats led the parade.

Through those years in the early-to-mid 1970s, at any number of games there was an airplane circling Sanford Stadium pulling a banner with the words, "Play Dixie, Fire Dancz." It was a courageous time to be a Redcoat, following a courageous leader in Roger Dancz.

I think I remember all 31 Homecoming ceremonies, but it's hard to tell them apart, because the script hasn't changed one word in all those years.

At the 1975 Cotton Bowl, back when my wife and I used to ride the buses with the band, we got all seven buses down a narrow, one-way street and could not make a turn at the end. All seven had to back up four blocks to get out of that jam. I rarely saw Roger Dancz get perturbed about anything, but that was quite a test.

I remember at the 1980 National Championship game in the Superdome in New Orleans getting to announce over the p-a, “Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States and Mrs. Carter,” as our special guests were introduced.

I remember an attempt to film a Coca-Cola television commercial at half-time. The production company was all in place, the film cameras were rolling. The Redcoats formed the famous Coca-Cola script writing the length of the field – and that wasn’t an easy feat. I was to get the crowd to sing along with the Coca-Cola jingle, “I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony...”, and then there was to be a giant balloon release. Well everything went fine until the last note, when the balloons got tangled up in their large plastic bags along the sidelines. The band held the last note, and held the last note...and the properties crew ran around trying to get the darn balloons to come out of those bags....in the end, it was a fiasco...and the commercial never made it to air.

I remember the last home game of 1980 – the last year before the east end zone was enclosed. As you may know, until that time the railroad tracks outside the east end zone were a great vantage point for a free view of the game, and the tracks were packed with fans 24 hours before every kickoff. The Redcoats dedicated that last show of 1980 to the track fans, playing the entire show to the east end zone, and ending it by having everyone in the stadium face that direction and wave goodbye to a great tradition.

I used to announce for the spring concert tour and the Mother’s Day concert, as well. At one year’s spring concert, the band did a piece called “Tubby the Tuba.” If you’re familiar with it, you may know that it has a solo part in which the narrator sings. Yes, I sang with the Redcoats, and I notice that we haven’t tried that again since.

I remember especially in 1985, when the band surprised me by telling me I was to be on the field for pre-game, not in the press box. I had only been the announcer 11 years at the time, but the band presented me with an honorary

life membership plaque. It still hangs in a place of honor in my office on campus.

These were all important moments in our history as a great institution – the Redcoat Band.

But this is an important moment in history.

It is highly unlikely that ever again this particular group of people will be assembled together as we are tonight.

So let's appreciate this moment for what it is, and put aside thoughts of other obligations and pressing needs.

Think about the people around you, and what it means to be part of an institution like this.

Why do we invest our time, our talents, our blood sweat and tears, in an institution like the Redcoat Band, or the University of Georgia, or our church, or our civic club?

We do it because institutions are unlike humans – if they are built on strong foundations for strong purposes, they can live a long, long time. Institutions will outlive us. They are living messages sent out to a time we will not see. Our children are part of those messages....and not just our children, but the children of all of us...future generations. They will continue to populate these institutions that we hold dear and carry them forward, because we have built value into the institutions for society, and the children of today will become the adults of tomorrow who will carry those values forward through the institutions we have left for them.

Ten years from now, or 20 years from now, or 50 or 100 years from now...it is not too hard to imagine that the Redcoat Band will be assembled much like we are assembled tonight...celebrating their contribution to another victorious UGA football season. We can believe that is true because we believe in the value of this organization.

What will they say of the Redcoat Band of 2005? Will they remember us as a strong brick in their foundation? Or will they say – “if only those folks had held up their part of the bargain?” We are willing to contribute so very much to the Redcoat Band because we trust that it will outlive us and will be part of our legacy to future generations. I trust that those future generations will say the Redcoats of 2005 continue to make them proud...and they will be thankful for the strong foundation you built for them.

We live in a highly technical, mechanistic society. We are taught how to work our increasingly complex gadgets. We know how to make a dollar in business every day. We know the mechanics of what to do. But do we know why we do it? If we don't know the why of what we do every day...why we do it...then we're missing the fundamental core values of life. And the why is to help people, to make society better, to make our contribution to that foundation for those future generations, by building a better society and stronger institutions to carry that society forward.

All the new technology in the world doesn't bring us as much hope and renewal as one little baby. Technology serves us. But babies renew us...as individuals and as the family of humanity. Our hope is not in the technology. It is in the children.

We celebrate each year as a milestone by marking our own birthday. Birthdays are important. It's a good time to take stock of what we've accomplished in the past year and what we have planned for the coming year. But there's one birthday that just knocks you for a loop. No, it's not 16 when you get to drive. And it's not 18 when you graduate high school and get to vote. And it's not 21 when you get to drink. Or 40 or 50 when you finally feel “old.” For me, it was birthday #22. For on my 22nd birthday, I suddenly realized that everything up to that point was prologue – it had all been preparation for true adulthood, which is getting out into the work-a-day world and making your own way by making your own contribution to society.

A good realization to have on or about your 22nd birthday is that to live well you have to live with hope. You need a positive outlook. As a venerable pastor of mine used to say, you have to live every day on tip-toe, reaching for the very highest. Part of that living on tip-toe is being a part of organizations that make a difference – a strong church, a strong university, an institution like the Redcoat Band...that will continue making a difference in lives far beyond the lifespan of any of us in this room today.

Part of this living on tip-toe is the realization that by giving to others we receive the most for ourselves. Philanthropy is not just for wealthy people. Generosity is not just for tax planning purposes. You have to have a heart for giving to others – both your time and your resources. I hope that as you make your ways in life, you will remember two particular institutions that have helped form you and that you have helped form – those being the University of Georgia...and the Redcoat Band. Do your part to keep the foundation strong, so that the Redcoat Band will be an institution that outlives us all providing value-added to society for generations to come.

That's why being a part of the Redcoat Band is something so very special. That's why we say, "Once a Redcoat, always a Redcoat – how sweet it is."