

# Off Beat: Now hear this about that old military megaphone



In the early 1900s, a megaphone was mounted in front of the steps at the Vancouver Barracks headquarters building entrance. (Handout)

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Turns out that the brass section in the U.S. Army's musical arsenal had its own heavy artillery.

That would be the curious-looking item that appeared in an old photograph we ran 10 days ago. The archive image was among then-and-now photos in a story about preserving the century-old Vancouver Barracks headquarters building.

The conical object mounted at the base of the HQ building's front steps was a megaphone, explained Fort Vancouver historian and Chief Ranger Greg Shine, who provided the image.

After retired soldier Jack Giesen read the story, the local military historian followed up with a more detailed explanation.

"It is indeed a megaphone," Giesen said, but it was "only intended for use by the post bugler.

"Post-wide bugle calls such as 'First Call,' 'Reveille' and 'Retreat' were made with use of the bugle megaphone so the sound would be louder and carry farther than otherwise possible.

"It was a standard fixture at military posts. I've seen them at different bases," Giesen said. "It was used up through World War II, even though they had electric PA systems."

A member of the Vancouver Barracks Military Association, Giesen delivered a history presentation in August. He highlighted some forgotten aspects of the former Army post that once stretched to what now is Fourth Plain Boulevard.

Giesen was on active duty from 1970 to 2004. "I've heard many bugle calls," Giesen said, although those "Big Bertha" bugle wake-ups weren't a feature of his own Army career.

Giesen forwarded a link to a March 1941 edition of "Modern Mechanix." The article about a bugle megaphone noted that it was a lot easier to call the troops to the mess hall than to get them out of their bunks.

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