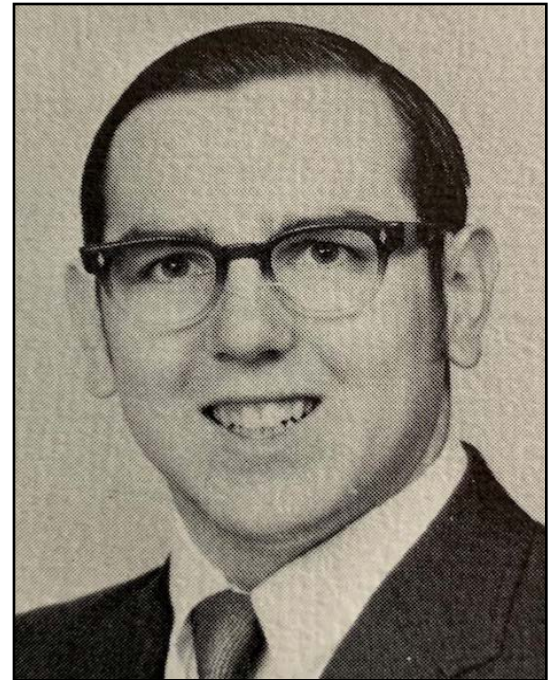


## Viking memories: A Drumbeat for a Lifetime

By Tom Bodle

Brrrrrrrummm...Go!Go! Brrrrrrrummm...St. Joe! Brrrrrum, Brrrrum, Brrrrum tee dum..Fight!

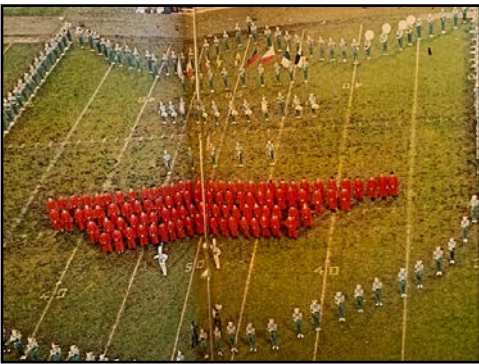
Memory evades me as to when I first heard the spirited cadence which was the hallmark of the Viking Marching Band for almost four decades. What I do recall is attending St. Joe football games beginning in 1959. Even though I had three older brothers who attended St. Joseph High School (Ken '60, Larry '61 and Jim '64) none of them were willing to drag their little brother to a high school football game. It wouldn't be cool. I did have a neighbor, Kevin Shea '71, whose cousin was a running back on the 1959 squad. Kevin's parents invited me to attend a game with them. For a seven year old, it was quite exciting to go to a real football game. I was enthralled by the cheering students, the stomping of feet on the metal stands at Euclid stadium, the players on the field and the marching band. Over my grade school years, the Sheas were gracious enough to invite me to several St. Joe's games each fall. Outside of the Browns, St. Joe's football was tops on my list. I knew the names of the Vikings best players as I knew the names of the Browns. I was witness to the emergence of St. Joe football into an Ohio gridiron powerhouse. The 1963 team went undefeated. At 9-0-1 it was the first Viking team to achieve that distinction. The 1964 team boasted of a defensive line bigger than the NFL champion Cleveland Browns. Paralleling the rise in the football program was development of the marching band. Norman Novak took the reins of the instrumental program in the early 60's. Visual evidence was shown as the band's midfield formation changed from J to SJ to SJH through the decade. Prior to game time, a pregame buzz resounded through the stands as the band exited their buses and formed their ranks to march into a stadium. Once aligned, the distant Brrrrrrrummm...Go! Go! Brrrrrrrummm...St. Joe! Brrrrrum, Brrrrum, Brrrrum tee dum..Fight! Could be heard, crescendoing louder as the band entered the stadium. Fans would pick up on the band's rhythm and cheer along with them. By the





time we entered St. Joe's as freshmen, the cadence had become a staple associated with St. Joseph High School.

The cadence permeated our four years of high school. Besides the football games, the cadence sounded off at rallies. For some rallies, the drum corps would march through the halls to collect students to move their way to the gym. Brrrrrrrummm...Go!Go! Brrrrrrrummm...St. Joe! Brrrrrum, Brrrrrum, Brrrrrum tee dum..Fight! echoed from the third floor as students line up behind the drummers. The growing numbers picked up classes on the second floor, the first floor, then entered the gym for the rally. Even during a fall school day, the cadence was present on the Viking campus. For those students having classes on the northside of the building, first and second period classes were difficult to fall asleep in. The marching band had practice and offered a distraction from biology lab or religion class. It truly was at the core of the Viking village.



It was on the field that the cadence became engraved in the hearts of the Viking faithful. Brrrrrrrummm...Go! Go! Brrrrrrrummm...St. Joe! Brrrrrum, Brrrrrum, Brrrrrum tee dum..Fight! Led the marching band to the entrance of the field. With fanfare the band's announcer (Dennis Eckart and Pete Ciofani during our four years) would proclaim "Entering at the north end of the field, the St. Joseph High School Marching Band under the direction of Mr. Norman Novak!" Crisply the band would strike up "When the Saints go marching In," and process onto the field for pre-game music and the national anthem. It was a scenario repeated weekly with pride and spirit. The band retreated from the field to create a tunnel to welcome the football team, once again blaring the sounds of "the Saints," then, with the cadence, moved into the stands to join the student cheering section. The cadence became a "goto" cheer at critical moments in football games. It was unique to the Viking identity and was the bond between the players on the field and the fans in the stands.



The pinnacle of this bond was acknowledged throughout northeast Ohio in October of our senior year. The Cleveland Plain Dealer featured St. Joseph football and music on the cover of their Friday PD Action Section. Full page articles on coach Gutbrod and the football team's success and on Mr. Novak with the prominence of the music program was on display. The article reflected what a special spirited environment was located in our city. Several weeks following the articles, the football team resoundingly defeated St. Ed in the night-cap of the Plain Dealer Charity game. The victory capped the second undefeated season in a row for the Vikings. Throughout the contest, Brrrrrrrummm...Go! Go! Brrrrrrrummm...St. Joe! Brrrrrum, Brrrrrum, Brrrrrum tee dum..Fight! could be heard resonating through the cavernous Cleveland Stadium. It was the sound of pride, spirit and victory, truly a memorable moment to define our senior year.

After graduation, I was always heartened that the cadence, along with other activities remained part of the St. Joe tradition. Enduring traditions are very important for a school community. In 1979, I returned to our alma mater as a teacher. Once again the cadence would become an integral part of my DNA. Yes, there were the games and rallies, but as a teacher, often with classes on the northside of the building, my first and second period classes were often distracted by the band and the cadence. At least the students couldn't sleep. It was hard to teach the Pythagorean Theorem to the beat: Brrrrrrrummm... a squared plus! Brrrrrrrummm...b squared equals ! Brrrrrum, Brrrrrum, Brrrrrum tee dum..c squared! This didn't seem to mesh.

In 1992, as St. Joe merged with Villa Angela and the instrumental music program declined in numbers, the marching band was discontinued. But to many Vikings of our era the cadence remained a memory. In 1999, I left VASJ and took a job at St. Edward. On the day of my hire I ran into Greg Urbas SJ'69, the successful Eagles' wrestling coach and math teacher. He greeted me with a high five and a "go..go.. St. Joe." Over my years as a teacher and coach many alums and even graduates of rival schools would ask about that cadence that went "go.. go..St. Joe."

It is amazing that a piece of music can intertwine into your psyche. I'm sure you all have a song that at times you cannot get out of your head. For a positive point the cadence has been that music, a motivator for me. Never being a runner, I have used long walks over the years to exercise. In times when the walks become boring or when I find myself slowing down, my mind tunes into the memory bank and recalls Brrrrrrrummm...Go! Go! Brrrrrrrummm...St. Joe! Brrrrrum, Brrrrrum, Brrrrrum tee dum..Fight! The adrenaline starts to flow as if it were 1969 and I am in the stands waiting for the start of a game. Memories of cherished days take away the boredom and motivate my finish. The cadence has been good for my heart and my heartbeat. It has been the drumbeat of my lifetime.

