GARRYOWEN - Irish (originally), Scottish, English; Jig and (in England) North-West Morris Dance Tune. "Garryowen," the name of a suburb of Limerick, was written c. 1770-1780 in honor of the moneyed young hooligans who ran riot in the Irish county at the time. Garryowen translates as "Owen's garden" and it was a general rendezvous for those with leisure time on their hands, situated on the slope of a hill in what was then the outskirts of the city of Limerick. The elderly drank together under the shade of trees, while young people sported with ball games and athletic contests on the green. It was a well-known trysting place. Later Owen's Garden became the scene of darker assignations, and began to acquire a reputation for high spirits, more abandoned drinking, fighting, and vandalism. According to old texts, the 'young gentlemen' amused themselves with parties at night in which the heads of geese were wrung, followed by vandalism where street lamps would be broken, watchmen assaulted, local homeowners harassed and passers-by accosted. The local goose population was especially hit hard.

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Military use of "Garryowen" as a march tune was quite early. The melody was the designated regimental march of the Royal Irish Regiment, organized in 1684 from Irish pikemen and musketeers by the Earl of Granard to fight for King William or Orange in the Williamite Wars (although its adoption may not date from that era). This unit distinguished itself at the Battle of Namur (Netherlands) in 1695 during the War of the Grand Alliance, where a grateful William granted them the title of "The Royal Regiment of Foot of Ireland." Additionally, in recognition of its deeds on this occasion, King William conferred the right of displaying the badge of the Harp and Crown, and that of the Lion of Nassau, with the explanatory legend.

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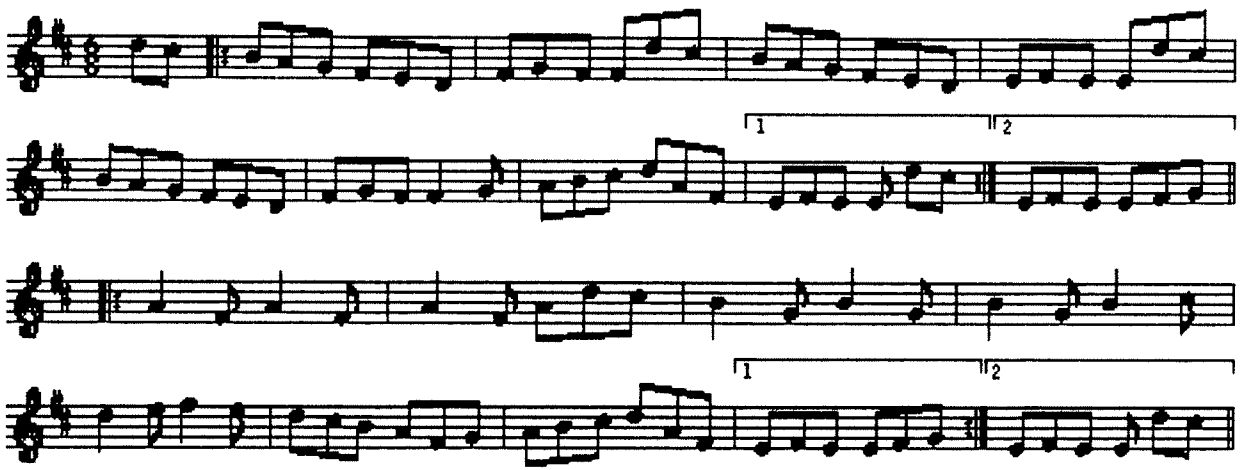
The tune was adopted as a marching air in the United States by Irish immigrants who formed units in their adopted country in the mid-19th century, and from there it probably found its way into more general use in the American military. For example, the famous "Fighting 69th" Infantry was first organized as a New York City militia unit early in 1851, known locally as the Second Regiment of Irish Volunteers. They chose "Garryowen" as their official regimental marching song. Since the regiment saw much active and intense duty in the Civil War it is natural to assume that its marching song was well-known in the Army of the Potomac. "Garryowen" was also adopted as a favorite marching air by General George Custer's 7th Cavalry, an association which helped to popularize the jig throughout country following Custer's demise. Custer was one of the youngest Generals in the Civil War, where he made his mark, and may have well been familiar with "Garryowen" during that conflict. Another suggestion has: "It had been said that the 7th acquired the song through Captain Miles Keogh, an Irishman and a former member of the Papal Guard, but it seems unlikely that (its American use) can be ascribed to a particular person, since 'Garryowen' appeared in a number of Civil War songsters, and was therefore presumably well known to any number of American soldiers in 1861-1865 dates preceding Keogh's association with the 7th". The 7th Regimental history gives that Custer heard the tune sung by Irish troopers who employed it as a drinking song. He liked the cadence, and soon began to hum the tune himself, perhaps because it "accentuates the cadence of marching horses." It was adopted as the regimental song soon after Custer arrived at Fort Riley, Kansas, to take over command of the unit. "Garryowen's" associations with cavalry units in the American West survived to the mid-20th century, and gained added currency when director John Ford used it as one of the musical themes in his acclaimed film "The Searchers," starring John Wayne. "Garryowen" became the Official Song of the American 1st Calvary Division in 1981.

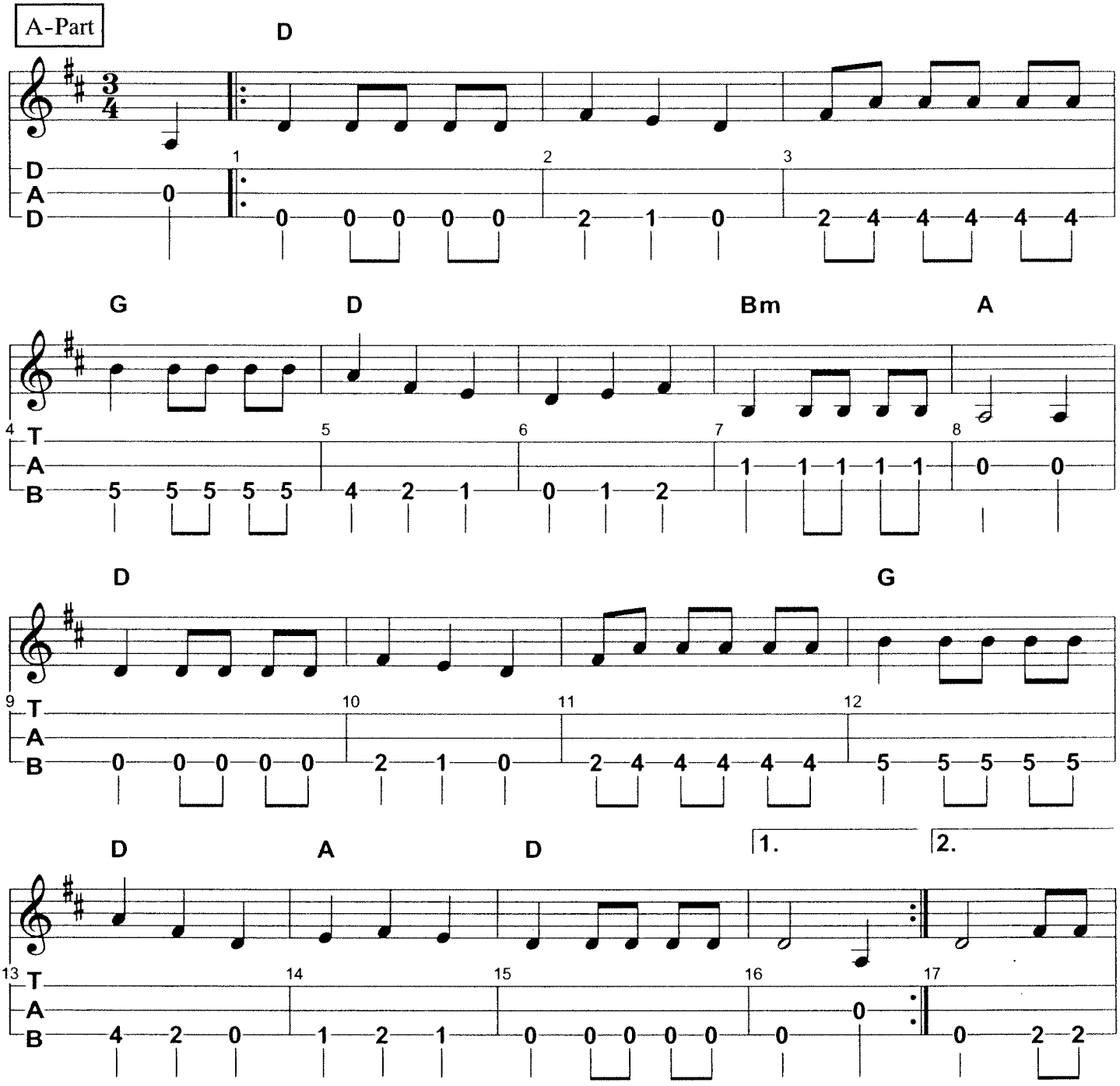
ROSIN THE BEAU. American, Waltz, Air and Contra Dance Tune; Irish, Jig; English, Morris Dance Tune (6/8 time). The tune is used for a single step in the North-West England morris dance tradition. Bayard (1981) notes the air was known to most fiddlers, fifers, and singers in Pennsylvania, as in many parts of the country. He identifies a melody by James Oswald which appears in his 2nd Collection (1740's, pg. 25) as a 6/8 "Gigg," that is extremely close to "Rosin," and he wonders if this was the ancestral tune for the air, or if Oswald himself was influenced by an older air. Further, he says a tune called "Dumfries House" in Gow's Complete Repository (3rd Ed., Part I, pg. 13) ascribed to John Riddle has a 2nd strain that equals "Rosin the Beau," and a Welsh harp tune in Bennett's Alawon fy Ngwlad also is quite close.
Regarding Irish versions, the Fleishchmann index (1998) gives that the tune was derived from a 17th century Irish tune in 6/4 meter called "On the Cold Ground;" that tune, however, is English, attributed to Matthew Lock from the play The Rivals. O'Neill (1922) remarks: "The name 'Rosin the Bow' has clung to the writer's memory since childhood, and the tune, like the song about 'Old Rosin the Bow' (a nickname for the fiddler) may have passed into oblivion, had not the melody been fortuitously found recently in a faded miscellaneous manuscript collection long discarded by (Chicago Police) Sergt. James O'Neill. A version of it I find is printed in Joyce's Old Irish Folk Music and Songs (1909)."
The title appears in a list of standard tunes in the square dance fiddler's repertoire, according to A.B. Moore in his History of Alabama, 1934. The title appears in a list of traditional Ozark Mountain fiddle tunes compiled by musicologist/folklorist Vance Randolph, published in 1954.

BONAPARTE CROSSING THE RHINE. Irish, originally. The present version must also represent a fairly antique development of the tune; it has a strongly impressed character of its own, and may readily be traced in Irish tradition. Though some of its variants serve for songs or dances, most of them have the same strong, martial swing. Called 'an ancient clan march', although not assigned any particular Irish sept. On the other hand, it is a wedding march, or 'hauling home' song tune, since it was used in County Limerick to accompany the progress of a newly-married couple home from church. Its frequently occurring Irish name, "Oro, 'Se do bheatha a'bhaile!' (Oro, Welcome Home). The tune, like other old and well known ones in our tradition, has been used for a number of purposes. In southwestern Pennsylvania this version is definitely a marching tune. When the volunteers from the communities of Pine Bank and Jollytown, went to camp at the time of the Civil War, they marched to the stately music of this tune as played by a 'martial band' (drums and fifes) made up of local folk musicians.

The Session: Tunes - Gary Owen's (jig)



Rosin The Beau



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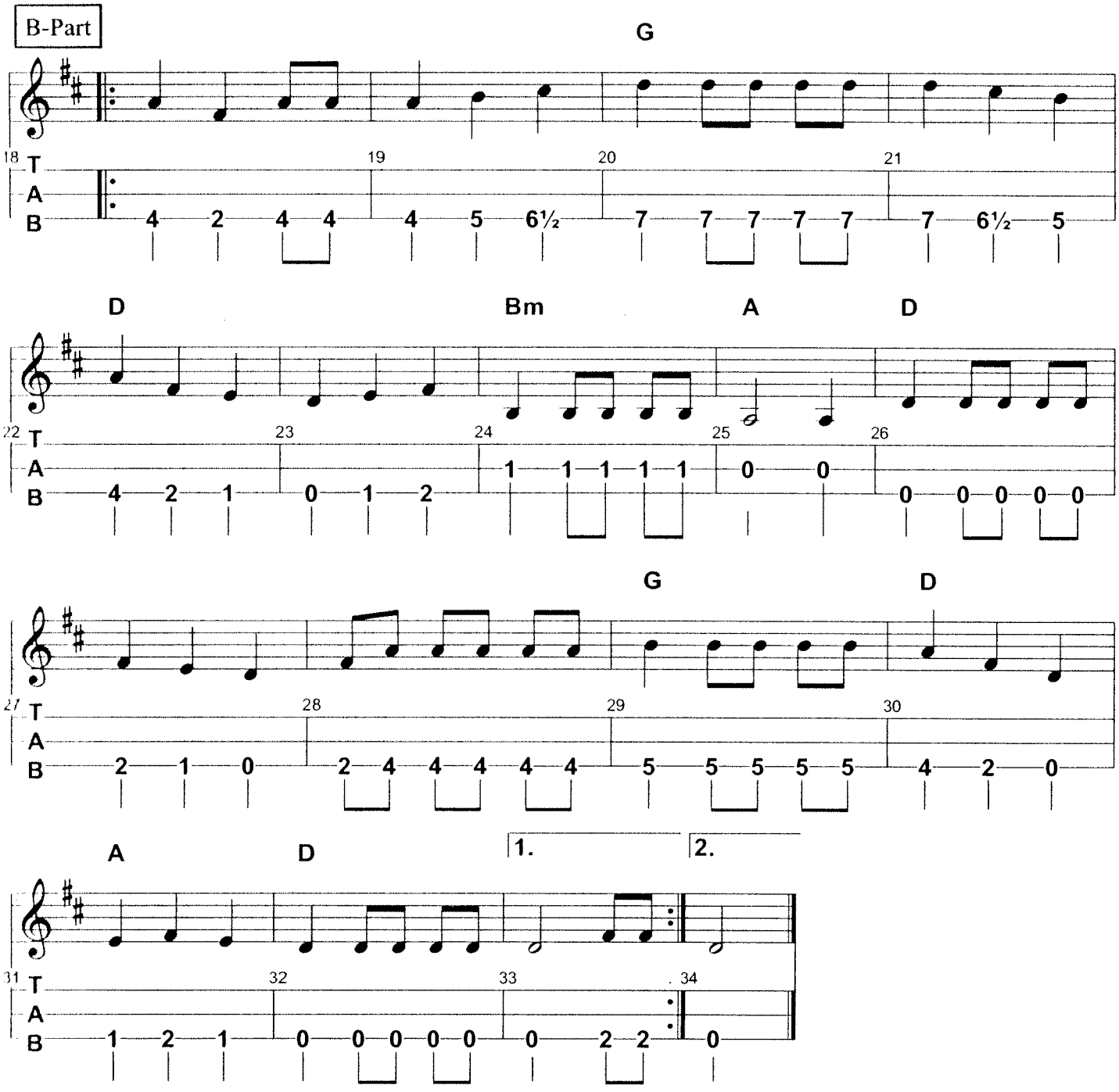
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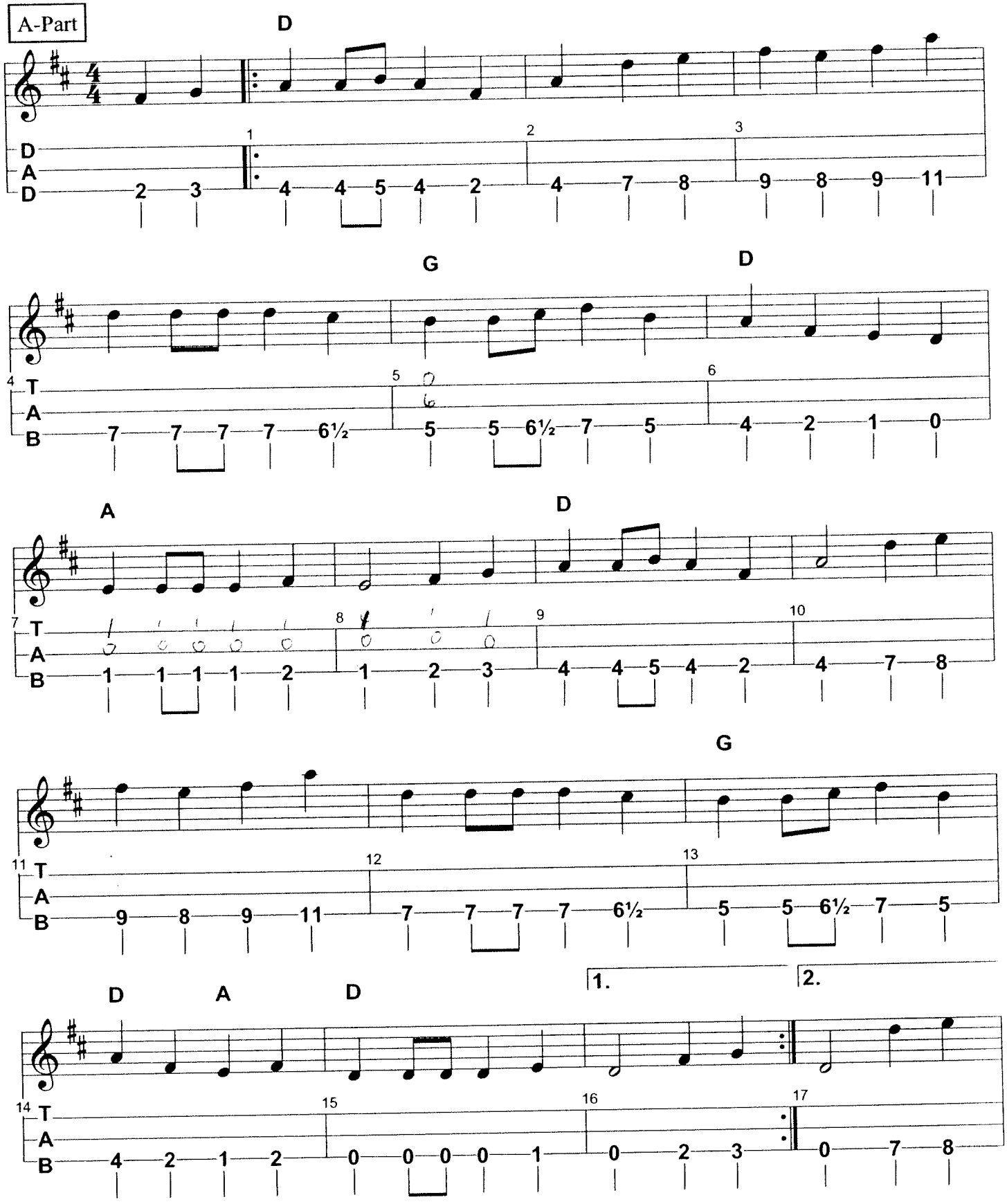
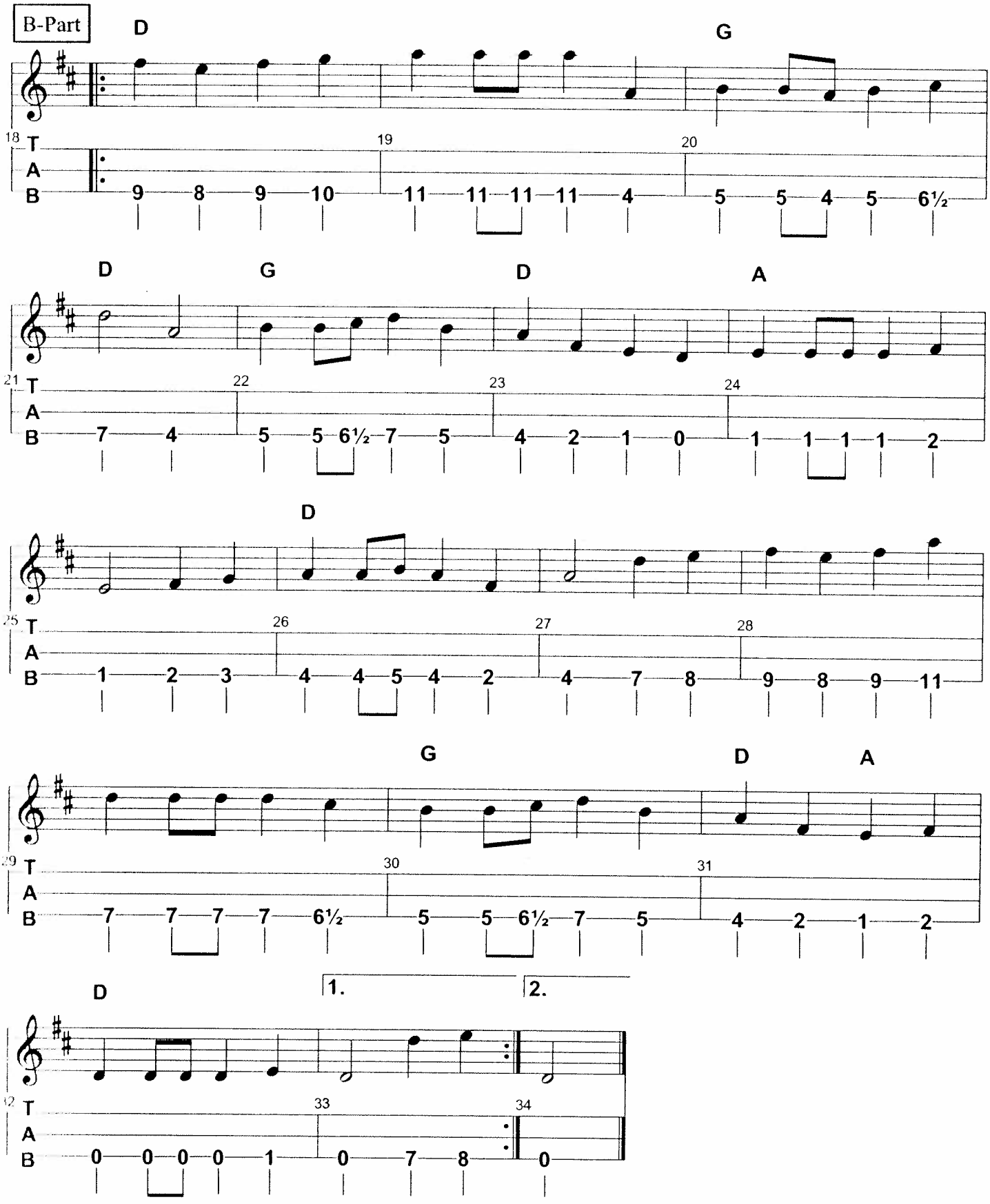
Bonaparte Crossing The Rhine

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