Kirk Hartung

Cyclone Marching Band Oral History Project

Interviewed by Jay Chapman

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Time stamps reference the video interview.

**JC:** Jay Chapman

**KH**: Kirk Hartung

[00:00:00]

**JC**: This is Jay Chapman, an interviewer for the Iowa State University Special Collections University Archives Iowa State University Cyclone Football ‘Varsity’ Marching Band Oral History [Project]. Today is Wednesday, January 3, 2024. I'm interviewing Kirk Hartung via Zoom. Kirk, thanks for joining us today.

[00:00:26]

**JC:** Could you maybe start by just telling us a little bit about your early life, where you came from, where you grew up, your family, and that sort of thing?

**KH**: Yes, I was born and raised in Des Moines. I am still here. Haven't gone far in life because I live on the same street I grew up on. Went to Saydel School District, and graduated there, then came to Iowa State in the fall of 1974. Got a degree in industrial engineering, then went on to law school at the University of Iowa, and now I have been a practicing patent attorney for the last forty-two years--in Des Moines.

[00:01:06]

**JC**: Great. So, what did you study? What were your studies like when you were at Iowa State?

**KH**: We were on the quarter system then, which is, of course, different than the semesters they have now. I started off undeclared and eventually ended up in engineering. It was a little bit strange because I switched into engineering when I was a junior. Most people were switching out of engineering. So, it did take me an extra year, which, of course, gave me another year of opportunity with the marching band and the pep band, so that was fun. I ended up with some credits that didn't apply to much, but finally finished with an engineering degree and then went down to law school.

[00:01:50]

**JC**: Great. Now, which bands were you in at Iowa State, and which years?

**KH**: I was in the marching band for four years, including two bowl game years, and I was in the pep band for five years, but the last year, I had the opportunity directed pep band, which was fun.

[00:02:09]

**JC**: Great. So, what was it like directing that pep band? That Hilton Coliseum, is that where you were at that time?

**KH**: Yes, of course, Hilton was different back then. That was before Johnny Orr [John Orr, Iowa State Men’s Basketball Coach (1980-1994)] came. Our average attendance probably filled the lower ring. So, three thousand to maybe four thousand was a typical attendance, so we were nowhere near full. The band, we filled it up with some good sound. My best story may be that we had, the year I directed, we got to play for the National Wrestling Championships which were held in Hilton. Of course, we had to do the national anthem, and there was some guest singer who we had never rehearsed with before. I told him, “Okay. I'll give you two, and we'll start on three.” Well, he started on two, and the band started on three.

**JC**: Oh my. [Chapman laughs] Well, that makes for an interesting performance, I guess.

[00:03:10]

**JC:** What section in the marching band were you in? What did you play? And is there anything interesting you wanted to note about your section?

**KH**: I was a trumpet player most of my career and played first trumpet, and that's what I still play when we go back for Alumni Band. I went one year in August--I was working at the Des Moines YMCA camp in Boone, and I had a little accident at the swimming pool and ended up with about twenty-four stitches in my lower lip. So, I could not put the trumpet mouthpiece on there, so they got me a baritone which went around the scar, underneath the scar. So, I played baritone for one season of marching band. I can still remember the fight songs on the baritone. The funny story was first rehearsal we start off with the fight song, and when we finished that, me on the baritone, the rank leader said, “How long have you been playing baritone?”

I looked at my watch. Said, “Well, how long did it take us to play that song? First time I picked one up.” [laughs]

[00:04:17]

**JC**: That's very fun. Interesting, interesting. Anything else special about your section or sections that you were in in the marching band?

**KH**: Oh, it was just a lot of good players. A lot of fun. It was interesting in those years--and I don't know if it's still true--overall, the marching band had very few music majors. You could probably count them on one hand, and so we had a lot of engineering students, a lot of students with other degrees, but hardly any music majors. We did have one trumpet guy that was a music major, which was fine, but overall, the talent came from non-music majors.

[00:05:01]

**JC**: Sure. So, what was it like learning and ultimately performing a show? How did you get from the drill to learning the music, to getting it to be ready to be performed at the stadium?

**KH**: Yes, it was always fun. It was challenging. Of course, yes, everybody memorized the music throughout the week, and oftentimes, if you had games on consecutive weeks, you only had five days of rehearsals to basically learn a whole new halftime show. The pregame show was the same every home game, but the halftime show was different every game, so we learned a new drill, we learned new music. I think it was just the repetition of it throughout the five days of practice, then a Saturday morning practice before the game. Of course, back in those days, we had the sheet music, not the iPhones or digital music.

[00:06:03]

**JC**: Where did your music rehearsals happen? And what about marching rehearsals, where did you practice?

**KH**: The marching rehearsals were on an open field north of Beyer Hall or Beyer Gymnasium. It was a grass field, so depending on weather, it could be muddy, it could be cold. The music building [Music Hall] was just to the east of that a couple of blocks in what was supposed to be temporary barracks from World War II, but they were still there in the 1970s, and that was the home for the music department.

[00:06:58]

**JC**: What was a practice like for a given day? What time did you start, and how did a practice progress throughout the day?

**KH**: As I recall, I think the practices were typically about an hour and a half long, starting, I can't remember if it was four or four-thirty. You usually get there. Be ready to go at the start time. So, people would stop by Music Hall, grab their instruments, grab their music, walk over to the field, which I would say a block and a half, a couple of blocks [away]. Then we would warm our lips up, and then we would get in our groups. Sometimes you would have just a short group rehearsal. Other times we just start on the field. I don't remember the specifics as to did we do the music first or the drill first, but eventually, yes, we put them together, and it came together with everybody. In those days, the band wasn't as big as it is now. My memory is a little bit faded on that because it's been going on almost fifty years. But I think that we were probably a little less than two hundred total students in the marching band.

[00:08:15]

**JC**: Okay. How many in your section would you say?

**KH**: Eight in each rank. I don't remember total number of trumpet players. I think we probably had four ranks, so somewhere in the order of thirty-two trumpet players.

[00:08:35]

**JC**: Okay. Do you recall some of the performances that you had, some of the shows that you did, and what those were like?

**KH**: The ones I remember best--my first year we were still in Clyde Williams football stadium when I was a freshman. Which was there on the northwest side of campus right by Helser and Friley dormitories. So, our first year, we performed there. We knew it was the last year. Jack Trice Stadium was being built, and we knew the next year would be at Jack Trice. So, for the last home game *ever* in in a Clyde Williams Field, we put together a real tear-jerker show, including “Auld Lang Syne” [song of Scottish origins played on the new year or used as a farewell]. That was going to be the finale of halftime, “Auld Lang Syne.” As the day came along, the weather was not very nice. It was rainy, and so the athletic department, in their infinite wisdom, decided that the band would not march at halftime because it would ruin the field for the second half. We're all scratch[ing] our head going, This is the last game ever, and there's only two more quarters left to play. How much are two hundred marching people going to ruin the field? So, we did not get to play “Auld Lang Syne” at Clyde Williams, which was a huge disappointment to the marching band members.

Then, the next year, my sophomore year, we moved to Jack Trice Stadium, which at that time was not called Jack Trice, I think it was called Cyclone Stadium. The first home game ever in Cyclone Stadium, we played Air Force [United States Air Force Academy], and Air Force brought their marching band. Here I am a little sophomore, only my second year in marching band, and here's these military marching band, and they're dressed in their dress whites and blues. It was kind of a white and a sky-blue uniform. And everybody in the Air Force band had silver brass instruments. I don't recall there were any woodwinds, it was all brass. They put on quite a show. I was impressed, and it was amazingly the first game ever in Cyclone Stadium and the Air Force kicker kicked a sixty-three-yard field goal, which I believe is still the stadium record almost fifty years later.

[00:11:03]

**JC**: Sure, sure. Can you contrast what it was like performing in old Clyde Williams versus what it was like playing then in Cyclone Stadium at that time. How were those different?

**KH**: Clyde Williams was much closer, much tighter. The stands were closer to the field, and of course, it wasn't as big of a seating capacity. I want to say Clyde Williams maybe sat about maybe thirty-five thousand, if I remember right. Of course, when we went to Cyclone Stadium, it was forty-five or fifty-four thousand before they enclosed all the end zones. It was a much bigger stadium, much more open, open on the in zones. Clyde Williams was closed on the south end zone. It was open on the north. So, it was a real different atmosphere, and I don't recall whether Cyclone Stadium, I believe it maybe had artificial turf in those early years. It wasn't muddy though, it was a lot further walk for us in the mornings to get there for rehearsal, so it was a real change in the atmosphere, but a good change.

[00:12:17]

**JC**; So where did the band sit in Clyde Williams during the game, and where did they sit in Cyclone Stadium?

**KH**: I don't remember exactly where we sat in Clyde Williams. In Cyclone Stadium, if my memory is right, neither end zone was enclosed, so we sat on the east side lower level, I believe, near the north end zone. Though, over the years, we've sat in a lot of different places, so not a hundred percent sure if my years match up. You were asking about some other memorable shows, and I might mention a couple. Perhaps the most memorable show was when we traveled to Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. Of course, back then, Oklahoma was always good. But the marching band, we got to go to one away game every year, so that year it was Oklahoma. I don't remember exactly which year it was. It might have been about my junior year, but somewhere ‘76, maybe ’77. We went to Oklahoma, and you go into the stadium, and it's just a sea of red. Red everywhere. It’s a large stadium, lots of people. I forget the capacity. I want to say seventy-plus thousand. We did a show down there--of course, we performed before the Oklahoma band performed, and as we finished our performance, we were spread from the twenty to the twenty across the field, marching towards their press box. We did, kind of, a patriotic show with lot of patriotic songs, and as we finished, we got a standing ovation from the Oklahoma fans. Of course, it helped that our color guard, the flag girls in the back, were unrolling about a dozen US flags. But that was pretty cool, to be marching across their field and get a standing ovation from their fans. That was one of the most memorable shows we did.

Another time we had a trip to Kansas. That was on a Saturday, and the following day, somehow, they arranged that we got to march for the Kansas City Chiefs. Of course, that was before Patrick Mahomes [Kansas City Chiefs quarterback (2017-present)]. But we marched the Chiefs. We did the song “The Rubber Band Man” with the Chiefettes and their dance squad. Yes, so marching at a NFL game, that was pretty special.

[00:14:54]

**JC**: Were there any other, either on campus or maybe elsewhere, performances that you might have had that were outside of the football stadium, outside of a traditional a football game?

**KH**: There was a tradition--not sure how it got started or who funded it--but Friday nights before home games, a small group of the marching band would go down to Granddaddy's, which was a local pub downtown, not in campus town, but in old downtown Ames. The proprietor or somebody there sponsored us to come in and play fight songs and a couple others throughout the night, maybe three or four times during the night. In exchange, they basically would give us all the beer we could drink. But we went, we played, and the place was usually packed, and when we got out on the dance floor and played the fight songs and stuff, it was fun. People loved it. So, that was usually a typical Friday night at Granddaddy's, which unfortunately burnt to the grounds several years later after I was long gone. So, no more Grandaddy's tradition.

[00:16:05]

**JC**: You talk about traditions. What other sorts of band traditions are there, maybe as part of pregame, or maybe separated even before pregame or after the game? What sort of traditions might have been out there for the marching band?

**KH**: One of the traditions that I believe was started when I was in the band.--the director was Jimmie Howard Reynolds, Joe Christensen [Joseph Christensen, Director of Bands (1980-1998)] was the assistant marching band director. This would have been after we moved into Cyclone Stadium, so 1975 or 1976. For the pregame show, we started the running cyclones, which are still used by the marching band today, by the ‘Varsity’ Band. That tradition, somebody's idea to do these running cyclones as we entered the field, has continued for almost fifty years. The other, call it a tradition if you will--the year we were going to Kansas to march, and then march in the Chiefs game. To help raise money for that, the night before the game, so after the Cyclones played, before we left the next day, they had us clean the stadium. I think this was 1977 or ‘78. After we cleaned the stadium, they allowed us to use the locker rooms to shower and clean up. It was a late game, I believe. Tim Jensen [Timothy Jensen, Political Science (1980-1985)] is the best one to tell the story because he was front and center for this--as they went into the locker room, the head football coach Earle Bruce said, “Hey, you can't use this. This is the varsity locker room.”

And Tim Jensen replied, “Well, we are the varsity band,” and we've been known as the ‘Varsity’ Band ever since. So, that's how we got the name the Cyclone Football ‘Varsity’ Marching Band.

**JC**: Nice. You said that was maybe ‘77.

**KH**: ‘77 or’ 78.

[00:18:12]

**JC**: Okay, great. Any other, again, ritual kind of things you did during game day, or things you did just kind of as part of a tradition during a game?

**KH**: On Saturday morning rehearsals before the game, many of the band members just came in their colorful pajamas. Basically, get out of bed and go to the stadium. In those days, most of us, I think, walked from wherever we lived on campus. So yes, pajamas during morning rehearsal is not uncommon. It wasn't universal, but a lot of people did that. We had on bus trips, we had five buses typically, so however many people you fit on five buses, including instruments and everything. Somehow bus five got the reputation to be the party bus, so that has a remained--no matter how many buses you have, bus five is the party bus.

[00:19:15]

**JC**: So, what was it like traveling on a bus with two-hundred-some other people and going down to Norman, Oklahoma? What was that whole weekend look like?

**KH**: It was always fun. It was one of these things where, yes, you're a nineteen, twenty, twenty-one-year-old kid, and you get to travel, and you get to be with your friends, and you get to make music, and you get a party. So yes, it was a fun time. I think coming home, the buses were pretty quiet. We were pretty tired. But it was the opportunity to do something that we wouldn't get a chance to do otherwise. It was always neat to go see another Big Eight university’s stadium. We marched in Oklahoma, we marched at Kansas [University of Kansas], we marched at K State [Kansas State University]. We took a small pep band once to Colorado [University of Colorado at Boulder] when they were still in the Big Eight, which was a beautiful stadium set there at the base of the mountains. So, that was very unique to see the different stadiums and their designs, and the fields.

[00:20:21]

**JC**: What would you say the crowds were like if you wanted to contrast what it was like? If you want to contrast--you said there are a ton of people, a sea of Red, and Oklahoma--what was it like to go to Colorado, to K State, or to Kansas?

**KH**: Each one is really different, in part because of the stadium configuration, I think, too, because the fans and where the stadium is located. For example, in Ames, with Jack Trice Stadium and all the parking around it, all the tailgating is right next to the stadium. Some of these other stadiums, the parking isn't as close. There's not as much tailgating in the immediate vicinity of the field, which really changes the atmosphere. I think the fans at every one, they're loyal. They’re going to cheer. They're going to be loud. They're going to wear their colors. But it's just fun to see how other schools do it. Not that anybody's different or better, but it's kind of neat to see other stadiums.

[00:21:29]

**JC**: Sure. So, shifting gears a little bit. Can you tell me a little bit about the marching band uniforms that were used while you were in the band? What were they like, what was the style, etcetera?

**KH**: We wore black wool uniforms, so on hot days they were really hot, and on the cold days you tried to put layers on underneath them. We had the overlay on them [which] I think was really cool because we had the front and the back, and each one was two side. So, we would wear one for pregame, then we would flip it for halftime. After we got in the stands after the pregame, we were all unfastening our overlays, which buttoned on at the shoulders. Of course, they had a belt, too, that had to be threaded through it. We would change from one overlay to the other just by reversing front and backs of them.

[00:22:23]

**JC**: Sure. What about the hats and the shoes?

**KH**: We wore a white shako with red and cardinal gold braids on it. We also had a little beret-style hat that would fit inside the shakos that we would wear in the stands. It was kind of like the overlays. We had different hats. One on the field and one in the stands The beret said, “Cy’s Big Wind.” I don't know who came up with that. They were red, basically red, with a white trim.

[00:23:04]

**JC**: Sure. Did you wear spats when you were marching?

**KH**: Yes, we wore white spats. So, black shoes, white spats. We also marched with the high step style, not drum and bugle corps style. So yes, raised knees, pointed toes.

[00:23:24]

**JC**: Okay. What would you say the culture of the band as a whole, what it was like when you were there? How was it shaped by individual members, maybe by the directors that you mentioned, or maybe even the university, how its role played in in making the overall culture of the band while you were there?

**KH**: I think it was a good culture. I mean, we made lifelong friends. Some of my best friends from Iowa State were in the band with me. I think in the early seventies before I got there--I started in ’74. I think it was ’72, Jimmie Howard Reynolds was the new director, and the biggest change he made was to allow women into the marching band. My understanding is prior to that, it was strictly men except for maybe a twirler here or there, or somebody playing bells. So, adding women to the instrumental marching, I think was a significant change. Number one, allowed us to grow the band and have more people, and of course, I don't think anybody can argue that it was not the right move. It was a co-ed band. I think every year we had a new drum majors. I don't recall whether we had anybody be drum major more than one year, but at least by my last year, we had a female drum major and a male drum major. We usually had two drum majors. I think the upperclassmen generally were the leaders of each rank. We would teach, train, mentor the freshman or even sophomores as they developed in the band. It was just a good team feeling, feeling of family, feeling of friends, and, of course, fun!

[00:25:20]

**JC**: As you were coming into the band, did you receive any advice as a freshman coming in? Or maybe on the flip side, as you were going out, were you imparting some words of wisdom to the freshman when you were a senior?

**KH**: I'm sure we did though I don't remember any specifics. I do recall, I believe, at least my freshman year, and it might have continued for two years, my sophomore year, the band marching band members received a small stipend. It was not much, and if you count how many hours you put in, it was pennies on the hour. But yes, we did receive a small stipend. For some reason I want to say it was maybe twenty-five dollars my first year.

[00:26:10]

**JC**: So, how did you balance, then, all of that time you spent in marching band, an hour and a half every day, and weekend travel. How did you balance that with academics? What was that like?

**KH**: I think that it's just something you had to figure out on your own, and I think probably everybody did it differently. It was not uncommon for people to come straight from class to marching band. It was not uncommon on trips for people to bring their books and be studying on the bus. Of course, yes, you take, figure, a couple hours a day out of your schedule to do marching band, you got to make up for it somewhere, which was probably either before or after band. I don't recall that we had much concern or problems with the people not succeeding academically, and it's just I think because band was an opportunity to meet people from other disciplines that you would never get a chance to meet otherwise. It was a, like I say, feeling of growing the family.

[00:27:20]

**JC**: So, you mentioned that very few music majors were in the band. The band of today is predominantly engineers. Was that the case when you were there?

**KH**: Yes, it was largely engineers. I'm sure there was some business majors and other colleges, but very, very few from the music department that were getting music majors.

[00:27:49]

**JC**: Did you or the band maybe experience any difficult times while you were a member of the band?

**KH**: Other than hot days and cold days and rainy days. [laughs] Which, of course, you just take it in stride. We did have raincoats on game day to protect the uniforms. Big heavy vinyl coats, with hoods that would protect the shakos too. But as far as other types of difficulties, not so much that I recall, I believe. But we probably didn't have much knowledge then that the band was on a very small budget. I don't know the details as to the relationship between band and the athlete department. It's one of those ones where I'm sure the band leadership took care of those things, and the marching band members, generally, we were just doing our job, and somebody else took care of the business side of it.

[00:28:59]

**JC**: Sure. From your observation, how do you feel the marching band has changed over time since you were in band to what you observed on the field, maybe at homecoming, etcetera? How do you feel it has maybe changed over time?

**KH**: Well, I think the biggest change, of course, is the size. We were, like I say, probably a little less than two hundred, and now they're three-fifty to three-seventy-five. Plus, now they also have the Storm [State Storm], which is basically, for lack of a better term, the JV band. When I was in the band, we did not have auditions. If you could play an instrument and march, you were in. I understand now, and for quite a number of years now, they have auditions for each section. So yes, if you're not able to rise to the top, you may not make the cut, which is a sad, but of course, they do have a budget. They have a limited number of uniforms, so you can't exceed the number of uniforms you have. In my day, everybody was welcome, everybody made it. I don't know how many uniforms we had, but obviously, that wasn't the criteria. That's probably one of the biggest changes, the growth in the band. It seems, too, that the band members probably take things much more serious now than we took it. We were pretty laid back. We would have our fun. We would have our parties. I think that that's probably been reined in somewhat, probably for the better. One thing we used to do when we went on these bus trips, whether it was Oklahoma, Kansas, wherever, after rehearsal, we would always gather on the fifty-yard line, and the band had a number of different songs that we would sing that we would pass on. Sometimes we would be joined by the other band, the home team band, and we would sing together. They would sing their songs. We would sing our songs. So, band songs were kind of a tradition back then, which I don't know if they still do that or not.

[00:31:17]

**JC**: You mentioned you made a lot of friends in band. What does the marching band in in its totality, what does that marching band mean to you, would you say?

**KH**: I would say, number one, I'm very proud to be a member of the Iowa State Marching Band and now the Alumni Band. I think that it adds another dynamic to the college experience. For example, I've seen my kids go to college and not participate in a group like that, and they are just more or less going class and doing their work, and they didn't really develop that network of friends that we did through the marching band. Being in it for four years, you had a lot of the same people in the band for four years so regardless of where they were from or what their education was being, it was a friendship. But, like I say, they've lasted for fifty years. I've always promoted to say, “When you go to college, get active in some organization. Something fun that you're passionate about, you enjoy.” In my case, it was marching band—and pep band.

[00:32:35]

**JC**: You mentioned Alumni Band. Can you maybe talk then about your participation in the Alumni Band and really, you know, your role in creating it?

**KH**: Yes, after I graduated in the spring of ’79, I went to Iowa Law School in the fall of ‘79. Since I enjoy sports, I participated in sports in high school, and intramurals at Iowa State, so I got tickets for the Iowa football games so I could go to those on Saturdays while I was at law school. At their homecoming, I noticed and observed that they had an alumni marching band. Not a big group. I don't recall if it was maybe fifty to seventy-five people. It gave me the idea that we need to do that at Iowa State. Why couldn't we? Because we all enjoyed it. We all regretted that we had to stop, so I wrote a letter to Joe Christensen and said, “We should do an Alumni Band. Let's get it started,” so that was kind of the seed that was planted. Joe took the next step. That was, I believe, the fall of ’79, and we got it started. So, 1981 [1980] was the first annual Iowa State Alumni Band, and we've been going strong ever since. I think there is a copy of my letter in the archives at the Iowa State Library. I've seen a copy of it there. I was surprised to find it there. Didn't know they had a copy of it. That was kind of the way it all got started, and I think the Alumni Band has grown beyond our wildest dreams. Not only do we have approximately three hundred people come back every year to make music again on the field, we also have done an amazing job of raising funds for the “Varsity” Band, for use on uniforms, instruments, travel, scholarships. I don't know the exact dollar amount, but I'm sure it's hundreds of thousands of dollars raised by the Alumni Band for the “Varsity” Band, which I think that's amazing, and I think the awareness of the band among the cyclone faithful, the football fans, has grown enormously. They know who we are. They know more about the band than they probably ever knew before. They've started to adopt the band programs, so the fans are also contributing financially to support the band. The relationship with the athletic department is better than it's ever been. They see the value of the band, the fun and excitement the band brings to the fans. It's kind of mutually beneficial for everybody, the band, the sports, the fans. It's a great thing, and it's been a pleasure to be part of it.

[00:35:56]

**JC**: Right. Well, are there any other questions that I haven't asked or subjects that I haven't covered that you maybe wanted to touch on that I wish I would have?

**KH**: I would say--I've been saying this for a few years--as we look forward to the fiftieth anniversary of the Alumni Band, which is in about the six years, I think. I think it would be amazing if we could have five hundred alumni come back. I think it's going to come from the younger alumni. But I'm sure we'll have some older ones that we haven't seen in many, many years. If we could hit a five hundred Alumni Marching Band milestone, that would be newsworthy.

[00:36:48]

**JC**: I agree, I agree. Anything else?

**KH**: There's probably, but I can't think of her right now. I think it's one of these things that, as I say, I think I can see it in the band members now that are in the varsity band, that they're having as much fun, they're building the same types of friendships, relationships, that we built over the years. It's one of those things where, as they graduate and come back, they continue the traditions, and those traditions will continue for many years. So that as college students join the marching band they will learn and see the history, they will learn and see the fun and the friendships that develop, and it will become an important part of their lives too.

[00:37:44]

**JC**: Right. Well, thank you very--

**KH**: I've always said Alumni Band and marching band is one of probably the top four, five things in my life that are important to me. So, I think it's a very exciting to see how it's happened. It's hard to believe that here it is forty-five years after I graduated, and I still get to come back and get on the field, make music with my friends. Kind of like the Willie Nelson song. On the field again. Instead of being “On the Road Again,” we're on the field again, making music with my friends!

**JC**: That's right. Well, thank you very much for your time.

**KH**: Thank you, Jay. Appreciate it.