

Where Did the Big Bands Go?

By Hap Hansen

I have previously told you about my Disc Jockey days when I was in the Army and stationed on Guam. One time the radio station there decided to have a music contest. We would have listeners call in with pledges to have us play either Country music or Big Band music. All donations went to a hospital and nursing home serving disabled WWII and Korean veterans. The big night came. The phone rang constantly requesting the Big Band sounds of Ralph Flanagan, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Ralph Marteri, Tommy and Jimmie Dorsey and others. There were more calls from the Country side requesting songs from Kenny Rodgers, Kitty Wells, Dolly Parton, Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings and many others. I was on the air for 36 straight hours and we collected over \$1,000 in pledges. I know that doesn't sound like much, but we must remember that in the early fifties, a Private earned \$72 per month and when one got promoted to Private First Class, the pay jumped to \$74 per month! When I got back to the barracks after the contest, I slept for 14 straight hours. However, in those days I didn't have to get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom!

I must admit that I did, and still do, enjoy listening to the Big Bands from the 30's and 40's. However, on that night, I heard more Country music than I ever wanted to hear! Of the more than \$1,000 collected, far more than half was pledged by Veterans who loved Country music. When I was discharged, I continued as a Disc Jockey and radio announcer for a few more years at a small commercial station in York, Nebraska. I did get away from constant Country music, but I was assigned to the late afternoon 'Teen Show.' That's where I had to play 'Teeny-Bopper' records for listening teenagers. I think I may also have told you that I took a newly-released teen record, listened to the first few bars on the air, then I opened the microphone, took the record off the turntable, and said, "This is the worst piece of music I have ever heard." Then I broke the record 'on-the-air!'

Three phone lines came into our radio station. All three lit up simultaneously with angry teenagers. The record I had broken was 'Hound Dog' by Elvis Presley! I had to go buy the dad-gummed record and play it for weeks, until a new Presley record came out. Oh please! Where did the Big Bands go?