





Installation view



## Lee Henderson An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict

**Artist's Statement** — In 2015, a controversy raged around the Calgary band then known as “Viet Cong,” and their decision to adopt a name so fraught with trauma, violence, nationalism, and imperialism. In observing the controversy, I contemplated both the costs of such a choice, and the rock music traditions of which it is the obvious result. *An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict* is the resulting compilation of musical bands named for wars, including acts of war, armed uprisings, military figures, and siege weapons.

As I continue to grow my list of these through research, I use that history to inform my choices as I design an embroidered patch for each, grouping them by relevant conflict—the Vietnam-American War, World War I, the Postwar Period, and so on. They are thus reconnected to the violence of their etymologies. After all, patches are how we demonstrate our belonging and our position within a subculture—whether as a Private First Class or as a fan of obscurely niche death metal—while the bodies they adorn onstage in a rock show (young adult, mostly male) are the same bodies we traditionally send to kill and die (young adult, mostly male).

(above) *An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict* (Postwar Period, 1945–1955), 2020



## a tomb in reverse

Jen Hutton

A thesis: a band name is a tomb in reverse.

A band, on the other hand, is a loose organization of people who come together to make noise or learn to play or record an album or stay up late or climb into dirty vans to play in strange towns for not nearly the cost of gas. A band does this because there is potent power in making music together. It makes them feel young for a while.

If you play in a band, or have played in one, you may agree that the band (the playing together, the staying up late, the dirty van, &c.) supercedes the band name. I have played in bands, both named and unnamed, not to necessarily feel youthful (as I don't know how else to feel) but as an antidote to writing. And yet, in bands, applying language to this thing we're doing is often the hardest thing about it.

These are band names: Crucial Taunt, The Police, Shaquille O'Neal's Summer Slam Dunk Camp, Picky Bunches, Yes. A name can come from anywhere: a movie title, an obscure reference, a song lyric, an inside joke, any sort of word salad . . . pretty much anything goes. I regard it strange that this kind of ersatz micro-poetry is an activity in itself, even for bands that may never exist. There's a certain posturing that a name affords, be it twee or off-putting or sedate, as a signal of musical genre or degree of swagger. To be sure, the fewer fucks you give to a name, the more audacious a move it probably is. So while some names are highly calculated, I do not doubt that many others are simply an afterthought.<sup>1</sup>

The only convention that seems to govern band naming is ensuring its originality within its sphere of reference. While music thrives on pastiche and appropriation fuels its creative engine, a band name must be utterly unique, which is odd given we generally do not mind reusing names elsewhere, such as for cities and streets. In its uniqueness, the band name is a brand, a name that becomes more and more indelible with each iteration of its performance: on stage; in a sweaty basement; on a cassette, CD, or vinyl; t-shirts, stickers, &c. I think this is what I mean by saying a band name is a tomb in reverse—it enshrines a potential limited to a particular time and place, or resurrects the dead to build something new from the ashes.<sup>2</sup>

The stories behind band names are a kind of lore relevant to perhaps their most die-hard fans. And Lee Henderson, who has begun a potentially interminable project, aptly and cheekily titled *An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict*, in turn questions the intentions behind (and subsequent effects of) band names that use war-related themes and vocabulary. From his research, Henderson has chosen to represent a selection of names as custom embroidered patches, the kind that would not be out of place on a band's merch table, but with designs that emulate military aesthetics: stripes, chevrons and other highly legible iterations of text and image in bold colours.

It is perhaps no surprise that many bands, primarily those who play in punk and metal genres, seem to exalt war in a very deliberate way. We need only gaze back at an accumulated history of gestures in culture to realize this is nothing new, from F.T. Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* to superhero comic books to Rambo. In the first half of the 20th century, the French dramatist and poet Antonin Artaud called for it in name, a "theatre of cruelty" in opposition to more conventional forms of performance. In Artaud's manifestos, essays, and letters, his own definition of cruelty was notoriously slippery. In one letter, Artaud wrote cruelty was "not synonymous with bloodshed"; in another letter written two months later Artaud stated he employed the word "in the sense of that pain apart from whose ineluctable necessity life could not continue."<sup>3</sup>

At its core, however, Artaud's "cruelty" is a kind of posturing; it is not actual bloodshed he seeks, but (like Marinetti before him) a way to completely upend the status quo. As poet and critic Maggie Nelson summarizes, for Artaud cruelty was a "hazing, or threshold" to a "more elemental, more animal, more 'natural' realm than that of the civilized world, with the latter's internalized psychic limits, fretting over ethics, hypocritical moralizing, tedious social contracts and policy debates."<sup>4</sup> I cannot help but think that punk, metal, and rock and roll, in their rawness, also seek something more "elemental" and "animal" to push on our "psychic limits," entreating an audience to take part in something that is completely antithetical to normative ways of seeing and being. Artaud and his theatre of cruelty seemed to prognosticate music's most extreme forms that appeared decades later: the frothy grind of a mosh pit, the sonic swell of shredding guitar, the assault of rapid-fire kick drum, stage pyrotechnics, vocals delivered as anguished screams. It's a different sort of shock and awe at play, albeit puerile, but still intended to shake a spectator from their foundations and get lost in (or even entirely annihilated by) a performance.

Perhaps less remarkably, I suspect some military vocabulary—the names of c-Charlie covert operations, warplanes, weapons, and even code words and acronyms—might sound tantalizingly foreign and obscure to a band, perhaps fulfilling that quality of uniqueness they seek. And yet war is all around us: our monuments to war and colonial power structures are ubiquitous in the everyday landscape, not only immortalized in statuary but as the names we've given to our cities and streets, and buildings, too. The persistent recycling of names is intended as a reminder of the past in theory, but the process seems to inure us to their original meaning or potency. For a band, while their work occurs in a particular time and place, through appropriation they may attach to a word's meaning anywhere along its timeline, from its originating past or its reinscribed, watered-down present. In Henderson's hands, however, these band names are returned to their point of origin given his choice to display the patches in thematic groupings according to the specific conflict or historical era they reference. These too appropriate from known vehicles for display:



Installation view

the standards and other regalia that decorate legion halls, or actual armed forces uniforms, which use badges to designate rank, division, or even accomplishment.<sup>5</sup> In these new presentations the names are flattened somewhat, set side-by-side regardless of genre, and rehistoricized to their origin.

So do band names that point to violent themes like war glorify violence in turn? I would say not necessarily. Assuming that a controversial band name is evidence of a questionable moral compass is a logical fallacy: a band's name doesn't necessarily have anything to do with what they actually sing about, or even their politics. But no band is exempt from critique, nor entitled to a name they never had any claim to in the first place, whether it was chosen deliberately or pulled from the flotsam and jetsam of available language. Some choose nonsense to make sense of war, or more accurately, point to its senselessness, but some would be better off leaving the dead alone.

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## Notes

1. In any case, most bands would do well to choose a name that can be heard intelligibly when yelled into a stranger's ear in a noisy bar, though a stack of merch by the stage generally resolves any potential confusion.
2. A note: a tomb in reverse (all lowercase, or not; with or without the leading article, depending on your own proclivities) is, to my knowledge, not yet claimed as a band name. Even writers rely on such hooks.
3. Antonin Artaud, "First Letter to J.P., September 13, 1932" and "Second Letter to J.P., November 14, 1932" in *The Theater and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 102.
4. Maggie Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 17.
5. It's interesting to note that surplus jackets and other tactical wear have been adopted as civilian garb, most visibly within several countercultural groups, starting with the freak scene in the mid- to late 1960s and extending into hardcore punk styles in the 1980s and 90s.

# Music and Military in Lockstep

Ted Barris

It was bloody stalemate. The war the soldiers were told would be over by Christmas raged on. Five months after its declaration in August 1914, the Great War had consumed Europe. Antwerp had fallen to the advancing German armies, and the Belgians had flooded the lowlands to halt the advance. The British and Canadians had held their ground when the Germans tried to break through at Ypres. Both sides had dug in, and trench warfare swallowed up countryside, livestock, munitions, and men across the Western Front.

Early in December, Pope Benedict XV floated the idea of a Christmas truce. The formal initiative failed. But on Christmas Eve 1914, along thirty miles of front lines in the fields of Flanders, guns and armies fell silent in apparent respect for Jesus' birth. British troops suddenly heard voices from the German lines a few hundred feet away singing, "*O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum / wie treu sind deine Blätter . . .*" A British soldier on guard duty wrote, "we thought we ought to retaliate," so they sang "The First Noel."<sup>1</sup> Then, soldiers on both sides sang "Silent Night" / "*Stille Nacht*" together. At several points along the front, enemy soldiers met in no man's land. They broke all military protocol and fraternized by exchanging cakes and cigarettes. At least for a few hours, peace was achieved in sentiment and song.

The Christmas truce of 1914 in the Great War has as much fiction as fact in its telling, but those shared Christmas carols remain an iconic moment of military lore. The songs and the sounds of music are enmeshed as deeply into the fabric of military culture as pledges of allegiance, guidons (flags) proclaiming battle honours, and regimental insignia on shoulder patches and pocket crests. Whether a cadence call while running or marching, taunts levelled at the enemy side, tunes shared around a campfire to calm nerves, or bawdy lyrics and melodies lubricated by liquor on leave, music abounds in military settings.



Nobody got through basic training, or boot camp, without surviving long marches, and the call-and-answer cadences seemed to help the miles and weariness pass. The lyrics have endured for a hundred years among US Army drill sergeants and the buck privates put through their paces:

Hey, hey we march in twos  
Marching down the avenue  
Two more days and we'll be through  
I won't have to look at you  
Ugly, ugly, ugly you  
One, two, three, four.  
One-two three-four.

In the American Civil War, music represented the values and symbols of the opposing sides. Confederate troops whistled "I Wish I Was in Dixie" and "Yellow Rose of Texas," while the Union side responded with "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" and "Battle Cry of Freedom." In the Great War the British sang "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" and "Oh, It's a Lovely War," while the Germans lamented "*Muß i denn, muß i denn*" (I must go) and boosted their spirits with "*Wo alle Straßen enden*" (Where all streets end). Meanwhile, one song was sung on both the Allied and German sides: "Lili Marleen" / "Lili Marlene."

On April 9, 1917 in the hours before 100,000 Canadian Expeditionary Force troops attacked the German Armies holding Vimy Ridge, music soothed the nervous soldiers waiting to go over the top. Members of the famous Canadian entertainment troupe, The Dumbells, who also served in Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, sang for their comrades—"The Wild, Wild Women (Are Making a Wild Man of Me)," "I Know Where the Flies Go," and "Hello My Dearie"—anything to calm jitters before what would end in a historic victory for the Allies during the Great War.

Of course, wherever service personnel gathered between ground offensives, naval engagements, or bombing operations—and particularly if an accordion, harmonica, or piano were present—out came the bawdy songs, too. Some were new takes on old favourites. During the Second World War, everybody knew how to sing or whistle the "Colonel Bogey March" (composed in 1914). But as soon as somebody struck up the tune and mixed it with the liquor in Allied pubs or canteens, out came the anti-Nazi lyrics:

Hitler has only got one ball  
Göring has got none at all  
Himmler has something sim'lar  
Poor Goebbels has no balls at all.

Indeed, when the beer was flowing, no song was safe. Both French and British soldiers, dating back to the mid-19th century, had sung "Mademoiselle from Armentières," but when the Americans got hold of the lyrics, the content of the song changed completely: "Oh, Mademoiselle from Armentières / She hasn't been kissed in

forty years / Hinkydinky parlezvous” became “She’ll do it for wine, she’ll do it for rum / And sometimes for chocolate or chewing gum.”

The Canadian armed forces ensured that they entertained their servicemen and women at home and overseas. All three branches of the forces orchestrated stage shows, revues, films, and broadcasts with men and women from their own ranks wherever Canadian soldiers, sailors, or airmen gathered on leave. Moreover, in the final days before the launch of Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, scores of service performers in the southern end of England kept up the spirits of hundreds of thousands of troops waiting for orders to go.

At the time, a couple of journeymen musicians from Canada—bass players Sam Levine and Murray Lauder—performed with the RCAF troupe known as The Blackouts. Each night the pair moved from one base to another while cordoned off in the top-secret zone of south England in anticipation of D-Day. When suddenly, on June 6, they were awakened early by the rumble of thousands of aircraft and ships departing England for France, the two musicians were overcome by what they were witnessing. So, they paid the outbound troops the highest compliment they could think of: they pulled out a book of standard string exercises, set up their bass viols facing the English Channel, and began playing duets to serenade the outbound armada. “That’s the way we did our bit for democracy,” Sam Levine said.<sup>2</sup>

Examples of both the uplifting and the ribald abound, historically, but music can also have a more direct use at the front—consider Robert Duvall’s role in *Apocalypse Now*. In Francis Ford Coppola’s 1979 epic interpretation of *Heart of Darkness*, Lt. Col. Bill Kilgore (a Gen. George Patton-like fictional character) leads an airborne attack against the Viet Cong with Richard Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” blaring from a reel-to-reel tape machine aboard his helicopter gunship.

Such musical accompaniment during modern-era warfare is not a Hollywood invention. In truth, during the Vietnam War, some US Marine foxholes blared forth Jimi Hendrix’s “Foxy Lady” to inspire American troops, though it’s equally likely that the song’s gunfire sound effects were intimidating to the enemy. More recently, in 1991, a US Air Force bomber pilot told the *Baltimore Sun* that he had slipped earphones into his official headset in the cockpit and played a cassette of Van Halen’s “Dreams” while flying missions over Iraq. Perhaps the idea was inspired by the fact that the single’s music video, released five years prior, featured the US Navy Blue Angels flying aerobatic formation maneuvers over the same soundtrack. Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction.

Even when we imagine wars, we can’t seem to resist infusing them with music. Consider Figrin D’an and the Modal Nodes, who entertain patrons during their downtime at the Mos Eisley Cantina in *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* (playing the John Williams compositions “Mad About Me” and “If Only I Could Let Go And Cry”). Conversely, Sy Snootles and the Max Rebo Band drum



An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (The Great War, 1914–1918) (detail), 2020

up the audience’s bloodlust at Jabba’s Palace in *Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*. Movie soundtracks are usually non-diegetic, but sometimes familiar tracks have a surprising diegetic role in combative contexts—such as when Glen Campbell’s “Southern Nights” is used to lull approaching troops into a false sense of security just before Rocket Raccoon gleefully slaughters them in *Guardians of the Galaxy*.

There’s a point here to be made about what we would like war to be, and what war actually is. Our collective imagining of it can be both more poetic (*Apocalypse Now*) and more bloodless (*Star Wars*) than the reality. The psycho-sonic projection device we call “music” lets those imaginings and realities blend. The same tune, even, can offer embodiment and drama for the peaceful citizen, and aesthetic distance for the beset warrior.

Not a soldier, but the soldier’s storyteller, not a veteran, but recognized by vets as keeper of the flame, **Ted Barris** has published 19 bestselling non-fiction books. For 50 years, he has worked as a journalist/broadcaster in Canada and the US. In 2011, he was one of 19 civilians presented with the Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation. In 2012, the Air Force Association of Canada selected him to receive the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. His book *The Great Escape* won the 2014 Libris Award as Best Non-Fiction Book in Canada. His book *Dam Busters* won the 2018 NORAD Trophy. And his book *Rush to Danger* was longlisted for the 2020 RBC Taylor Prize for Non-Fiction.

#### Notes

1. The British soldier was Graham Williams, quoted in Jim Murphy’s book *Truce: The Day the Soldiers Stopped Fighting* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2009). He was quoted again in Katie Daubs’ article, “When German, British soldiers carolled and played (we think) soccer,” *Toronto Star*, December 19, 2014. [https://www.thestar.com/news/world/ww1/2014/12/19/when\\_german\\_british\\_soldiers\\_carolled\\_and\\_played\\_we\\_think\\_soccer.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/world/ww1/2014/12/19/when_german_british_soldiers_carolled_and_played_we_think_soccer.html)
2. See interview conducted by Alex Barris in Agincourt, Ontario, July 6, 1993 in Ted Barris, *Days of Victory: Canadians Remember, 1939–1945* (Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1995).

**Lee Henderson**

**An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict**

April 7 – September 5, 2021

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Writers	Ted Barris, Jen Hutton
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**LIST OF WORKS**

Height x width

*An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (American Civil War, 1861–1865)*, 2020; embroidery on various fibres, on wool; 35.6 x 50.8 cm

*An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (Canadian groups)*, 2020; embroidery on cotton, wool, synthetic fibre, army surplus fabric; 139.7 x 55.9 cm

*An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966–1976)*, 2020; embroidery on various fibres, on wool; 38.1 x 76.2 cm

*An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (Interwar Period, 1918–1939)*, 2020; embroidery on various fibres, on wool; 35.6 x 50.8 cm

*An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (Postwar Period, 1945–1955)*, 2020; embroidery on various fibres, on wool; 55.9 x 76.2 cm

*An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939)*, 2020; embroidery on various fibres, on wool; 38.1 x 76.2 cm

*An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (The American Revolutionary War, 1775–1783)*, 2020; embroidery on cotton, wool, synthetic fibre, army surplus fabric; 152.4 x 55.9 cm

*An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (The Cold War, 1947–1991)*, 2020; embroidery on cotton, wool, synthetic fibre, army surplus fabric; 152.4 x 152.4 cm

*An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (The Great War, 1914–1918)*, 2020; embroidery on various fibres, on wool; 45.7 x 58.4 cm

*An Abridged Sonic History of Global Conflict (The Vietnam War, 1955–1975)*, 2020; embroidery on cotton, wool, synthetic fibre, army surplus fabric; 127 x 55.9 cm

**ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Lee Henderson is a contemporary artist whose practice includes video, photography, installation, sculpture, performance, and text. His work moves in constant contemplation of death, in senses grand and minute, somewhere between the persistence of collective histories and the brevity of individual lives. Henderson has studied art in Canada and Germany, holding a BFA from the Alberta College of Art and Design (2003) and an MFA from the University of Regina (2005). Recent and upcoming projects include the CONTACT Feature Exhibition *To Step From Shadow Into the Warmth of the Sun* at Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography (Toronto, 2018); *A Hand That Points Aligns the Air* at Open Studio (Toronto, 2017); and solo exhibitions at Gallery 101 (Ottawa, 2018) and Latitude 53 Contemporary Visual Culture (Edmonton, 2016). Henderson represented Canada as the 2017 Glenfiddich Artist in Residence, and is a winner of the Gattuso Prize for his 2016 CONTACT exhibition *Never Letting Us Take Breath*. He teaches photography and new media at OCAD and Ryerson Universities in Toronto.



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