

December 2020 Newsletter



SEASON'S GREETINGS

From Abertillery Orpheus

Male Choir

Founded 1908



End of Year Message from the Chairman

Dear Fellow Choristers, Friends & Supporters,

I think we can all agree that 2020 has not been a great year for the performing arts, and that it has been equally hard for hundreds of local choral organisations like ourselves'. But please spare a thought for the 7500 theatre and live event workers who have been made redundant, and the 170,000 jobs lost in the 'live' music sector. All this has taken place within the context of 62,000 Covid 19 deaths in England and Wales, and for our generation it is no comfort to learn that most of the loss and suffering has involved people aged 65 and older.

Despite our ability to adapt to changed circumstance, it is terribly frustrating all the same that we are unable to meet up for practice evenings, and that our planned performances have had to be cancelled. Whilst this difficult time has allowed us to re-evaluate what is really important in our lives, I know of no chorister that feels any less passionate about singing, and its attendant benefits of health and comradeship.

No doubt many of you have been following closely any new information that offers hope in relation to choral singing. Sadly, the scientists and politicians involved in scrutinising this area rarely consider age vulnerability or confidence levels. My own view is that our type of choir, and the audiences we attract, will not return until a vaccine is widely available.

There is no escaping the fact we are enduring the longest period of suspension in our Choir's proud history, but every member of the Management Committee is determined to do all we can to keep spirits lifted... **until we meet again.**

So let me say thanks to those of you who organise, participate, and contribute to our monthly management committee, our monthly choir quiz, our weekly wild rambles, our Newsletter, and our occasional outdoor socially distanced gatherings.

Lastly, and on behalf of the AOMC Management Committee, I wish each and every one a happy end of year and a return to song sometime in 2021.

Yma O Hyd.

Mick Bishop

The Choir & WWI

Abertillery Orpheus choirs regularly participate in Remembrance concerts and events. In 2018 the Ladies Choir sung at the Menin Gate, and later in the year the Male Choir (pictured below) joined the Royal British Legion at local cemeteries to make its own contribution to nationwide WWI Centenary events.



Like many other choristers I have a keen interest in the history of AOMC and resolved to find out just how WWI impacted on our choir. The records are somewhat spartan and hard to decipher but there is some information. It is worth mentioning that virtually every member of our choir in August 1914 was a miner, and that in July 1915, the Govt introduced the 'Munitions of War Act', that designated mining a 'reserved' occupation. In practice this meant no miner could leave the industry, or enlist, without a 'certificate of leave'.

We know that at least one of our boys, a miner, enlisted (and there may well be others). Private Oliver Elliott, a second tenor, and 'Orpheus Glee Party' founder member, joined the 1/3rd Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment in December 1914, and served in France until April 1916 before returning home. Oliver, uncle to our own John Elliott, would have been present at the 2nd Battle of Ypres, on the 8th May 1915, when the 3rd Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment, '*... made one of the most gallant stands in military history when obeying the order to stand to the last man, the battalion was practically annihilated, and without giving an inch of ground to the enemy, ... lost 703 men killed and wounded; all but a handful of officers and men remained*'.
[History of the Third Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment]

The Choir & WWI

The first three months of WWI were extremely difficult for the British Expeditionary Force. Choir members, no doubt reflecting a wider concern in their community, chapels, and work-place, decided to act. On the 24th September 1914, the choir committee carried, *'...that we assist in the Concert for the Work for Women's Fund'*. This body engaged women to produce textiles and clothing for the war effort. On 14th November 1914, it carried, *'that we offer our services to the local committee of the Belgian Relief Fund...'*

The brutal and bloody first day on the Somme battlefield had a profound effect at home. On the 4th August 1916, the choir committee carried, *'that the male choir dispense with practices until October'*. The choir, now numbering twenty-one reconvened on the 26th October 1916 but it managed only three practices before dispersing for a further six months. It was not until the 11th May 1917, that John George Cordey, Choir Chairman, called a General Meeting which carried, *'that we call a meeting on Friday next at 7.30pm, of the Society to inform absentees of the object of the meeting, namely, to discuss the advisability of winding up the affairs of the Party, or otherwise'*. On the 18th May 1917, a second General Meeting responded with wiser heads and resolved, *'that we carry on with our practices'*.

[Excerpts Taken AOMC from Minute Books 1 Jan 1910-29 July 1919]

Mick Bishop



AOMC Repertoire WordSearch

Find the repertoire listed in the WordSearch Grid on the next page.

Please note that there are no spaces between words on the grid and none of the letters are used more than once.

Anthem

Blame it on the Bossa Nova

Deus Salutis

Gweddiaffricanaidd

Llanfair

Morte Christe

Shenandoah

Softly as I leave you

This is the Moment

Ar Lan y Mor

Calon Lan

Eli Jenkins Prayer

Marching

Pokarekareana

Sleep Sweet

Stout Hearted Men

Benedictus

Cwm Rhondda

Gwahoddiad

Let All Men Sing

Men of Harlech

Rhythm of Life

Sloop John B

The Wonder of You

AOMC Xmas Wordsearch

Please note that there are no spaces between words on the grid and none of the letters are used more than once.

T	U	M	B	S	T	R	K	M	A	Q	S	H	G	M
E	N	K	O	L	L	T	I	R	E	I	O	N	E	E
F	Q	E	V	R	M	E	L	A	T	H	I	C	B	N
I	G	C	M	D	T	A	E	U	F	S	T	E	Q	O
L	L	N	R	O	N	E	L	P	N	N	N	N	N	F
F	R	L	I	Y	M	A	C	E	S	E	A	A	A	H
O	C	Q	M	H	S	E	M	H	D	W	L	L	H	A
M	N	O	I	S	C	L	H	I	R	N	E	Z	L	R
H	R	I	U	H	L	R	C	T	O	I	U	E	O	L
T	C	E	Y	A	Z	T	A	L	S	Q	S	B	T	E
Y	D	P	T	T	U	P	A	M	W	I	O	T	C	C
H	D	E	V	S	C	C	H	E	T	H	S	H	E	H
R	L	H	A	O	D	N	A	N	E	H	S	I	Y	R
A	N	A	E	R	A	K	E	R	A	K	O	P	H	C
T	H	E	W	O	N	D	E	R	O	F	Y	O	U	T

The Bundred Hundred.

This year we had hoped the choir would be celebrating the 100th Anniversary of a concert by the Abertillery Orpheus Male Choir which took place on Sunday 1st August 1920 at the Abertillery Recreation Grounds, conducted by Mr Tom Bundred, accompanied by Mr Cliff Morgan. With COVID-19 restrictions this was not possible.

Iola Davies, Tom's granddaughter, has kindly submitted the following article about our illustrious founding conductor.

Sadly I never knew my grandfather Tom Bundred - my mother Olga only being 13 herself when her father died. So my knowledge about him not only as a public person - precentor, adjudicator and conductor - but also as a family man is a reflection of the accounts and memories of others. I used to wonder as a teenager about the surname Bundred and how it turned up in a Welsh valley amongst all the Williamses, Davieses, Evanses....eventually finding out that Tom's grandfather Abraham was part of that massive migration of labour into the South Wales Coalfield in the second half of the 19th century. Abraham had come down from Denbighshire where the Bundreds had settled as agricultural labourers after a move across from Leek in Staffordshire in the early 18th century. Abraham's son Daniel became a well-known musician in the Nantyglo and Blaina area and the Precentor at Carmel CM chapel in Abertillery. It was not surprising therefore that his son Tom developed an early interest in music. At 18 he was Precentor at Trinity Presbyterian Chapel. At about the same age Olga, carrying on the musical tradition was an organist and also Sunday School teacher at Trinity when my father Ffranccon Davies became the Minister there. They married in 1946.

This is the story I heard from my grandmother Ruby about how the choir started up..... a group of young men including Tom Bundred were on a train on the way back from a day trip when one of them struck up a song. The group all joined in and at the end there was such a show of appreciation from the other passengers that the idea of a choir was formed. Anecdotal or not it certainly seems to ring true. Tom became the new choir's conductor and remained so up until his untimely death at the age of 48 in March 1937.

It was through the choir that Tom and Ruby met. This was the story.....Miss Edenden the accompanist broke her wrist just before a concert date. The search was on to find a replacement at short notice. It happened that one of the choir members was a neighbour of a young woman called Ruby Harding who had just finished studying the piano at Cardiff University music school. Ruby agreed to step in and from that time became one of the choir accompanists. Tom and Ruby married in 1920.

Interestingly, Ruby's mother was called Clara Novello after Clara Novello Davies the well-known Welsh singer and conductor showing that that side of the family were also music-orientated. Perhaps it was from Clara Novello Davies setting up a ladies choir in 1883 that Tom was inspired to establish the Abertillery Ladies Orpheus Choir in 1911 especially since the Orpheus Male Choir was proving such a success. Tom was also the conductor, with Ruby as accompanist, of the Juvenile Choir which won first prize at an Eisteddfod held in Abergavenny in April 1922 going on to achieve three further successes in a short period of time, two of which were classed as 'of outstanding merit'.

At the Eisteddfod Genedlaethol (National) in Barry in 1920, Tom's conducting of the Male Voice Choir brought high praise from Dr Walford Davies who commented on their outstanding tone, balance and control. Tom also tried his hand at composing. Most of his work has disappeared though it seems his setting to music of the Afro-American spiritual 'Steal Away' may have recently come to light. It was sung at the graveside in Brynithel Cemetery where he was buried in March 1937. Tom started his working life as a miner but eventually left the colliery and became an insurance agent for the Prudential a position he held until his death. Aside from his public life Tom was a happy family man. My mother had memories of him teaching her to sing while her mother started her off on the piano. The three of them enjoyed day trips together, often with their local extended families, as well as their annual summer holiday to Southsea.

Iola Davies





Hello Choristers, Ladies of the Eurydice and Friends of the Choir.

I have again been tasked by our illustrious Management Committee to up date you all on the latest situations and currant developments at Brynithel Organic Gardeners group **The BOG**. Much has happened since my last report and I can up date you on the following developments:

The currant situation:

I stated in my last report all was well with the currants and a bumper crop was expected I did indeed get a bumper crop but I am sorry to inform you I've got more on my plate than I bargained for. There has been some fruity goings on at the allotment. The strawberries took the cream then blew a raspberry at a pear of apple and black currant tarts. The dish fell out with the spoon over a rhubarb crumble. Things have now calmed down. All have agreed not to dig up the whole allotment over a fruit trifle and they should put the past behind them and stop raking over old ground, other wise it might turn into another Eaton mess and we've got enough of those boys running the country as it is. Disappointingly my 20/20 vision of the allotment did not spot this trouble coming but with a Vax Scene in sight my vision for 20/21 should prove a better year .

The SAGE situation:

We have had some news from our man at SAGE Phil Wallace Ba s.h.e.r. News from him is sparse but he is flat as you would expect. He is still a member of the SAGE group but he tells me Carrie has cleaned out Boris' office as she couldn't get the pram in . So Dom's gone, back up north apparently; also the SAGE is to be pruned early next year and Boris has re assigned him to hunt down the last remaining government Expert who has not appeared on the tele . Phil reports Dom's world class track 'n' trace app can't locate this expert and there's no trace of him anywhere and Dom's got the map of the British isles in his ruck sack . But he has issued a description as follows he is tall and handsome wearing a red wine coloured blazer, white shirt, red tie, black trousers, black socks and shoes. If you see anyone that fits this description – phone a friend

The Vax Scene:

Plans are being put in place to roll out the red carpet for the Mass Vax Scene as it will be available very shortly. However there are chinese whispers circulating with covid19 that the POPE is not happy that it is being rolled out at Sunday MASS and his holiness has complained to his boss, who in turn spoke with Boris and told him to bypass parliament again and declare it an act of God. He is to ask James Dyson if he could do it with his Dyson V10 on a Saturday afternoon during the 6 nations as nobody will notice. Carrie thought it was a marvellous idea and told Boris to shuffle a bit quicker and get it done. Don't panic if you don't have a Vax or a Dyson as adapters for all cleaners will be made available from the DHS. Our man, soon to be Sir Francis Drakeford, has spoken with the tartan lady, Nic, about the red carpet roll out and she complained to the Drake it's not fair the carpet is red and she will insist it should be a tartan carpet for the jocks - anyway she's come up Trumps and she's re-building Adrian's wall using bricks he doesn't need anymore - some job he had lined up down Mexico way that has fell thro. She reckons with the wall back up Scotland will be isolated and she will be the new Queen Nic of Scotland.

COVID Christmas. Up date

Santa Claus was on furlough through the summer but he's now working from home and he has sent the following Christmas message to the choir:

- ♦ There can be No kissing under the mistletoe this year.
- ♦ Pantomimes will be resumed only when we return to practice.
- ♦ The New Years honours will be restricted to choir management committee members only.
- ♦ The Christmas Day Queens message is to be held on zoom - Contact Kev Harris for details on how to join meeting.
- ♦ The Christmas fairy has lost her wand so there can be no magic Solution to this pandemic.
- ♦ You must abide with Boris and our man Drakeford and follow the rules.
- ♦ So there is no point in dreaming of a White Christmas while we are in this pandemic nightmare.



Meet the Choir



Vice-Chairman - Alan Powell

I joined the choir in March 2017 and was elected Vice-Chairman in 2019. I am a former member of the Royal Navy having served over 32 years and am now a civil servant still working for the MoD. I always harboured ambitions about singing with my father-in-law, Norman Llewelyn, but could never commit to practices or concerts due to my Naval commitments; then unfortunately Norman passed suddenly before I left the Navy so his ambition never came to fruition.

I was cajoled into joining the choir by the Thomas brothers at their mother's wake early 2017. There may have been beer involved as part of the persuasion but there was definitely a large carrot; representing Wales at "Le Festival Interceltique de Lorient". Didn't take a lot really, I was won over at the "Representing Wales" statement. Committed to give my best to this I downloaded representations of the repertoire on MP3 and listened to them whenever I could.

My first concert tour was to Hinkley, Leicestershire, where both the Ladies and Men's choirs performed at the Hinkley United Reform Church with the local Burbage Harmonic Voices; an excellent event to a packed church with fantastic hosts. On completion of the concert the choirs decamped to local hostelry "The Union Inn" to unwind and critique the days excellent event with a couple of libations of course; this somehow led to more singing and it's at this point I realised there was another repertoire to learn.

The Burbage Harmonic voices have since been to Abertillery as their first ever tour, again another marvellous event. The Inter-Celtic festival was a week never to forget and each member of Abertillery and Cwm choirs have their own memories, stories and friendship bonds from that busy, tiring but outstanding time.

I have since ticked off many a UK choir tour which included another massive highlight in the Albert Hall for the "Festival of Massed Male Choirs" in May 2018.

Meet the Choir— Alan Powell (cont)

My ambitions are for the choir to continue and grow but I believe that the addition of a few modern numbers could attract younger members to what is a fantastic organisation.

I am also an active member of the local Royal British Legion Branch, runs an allotment (poorly) and enjoys dog walking, watching rugby (although a bit dubious about the national team lately).

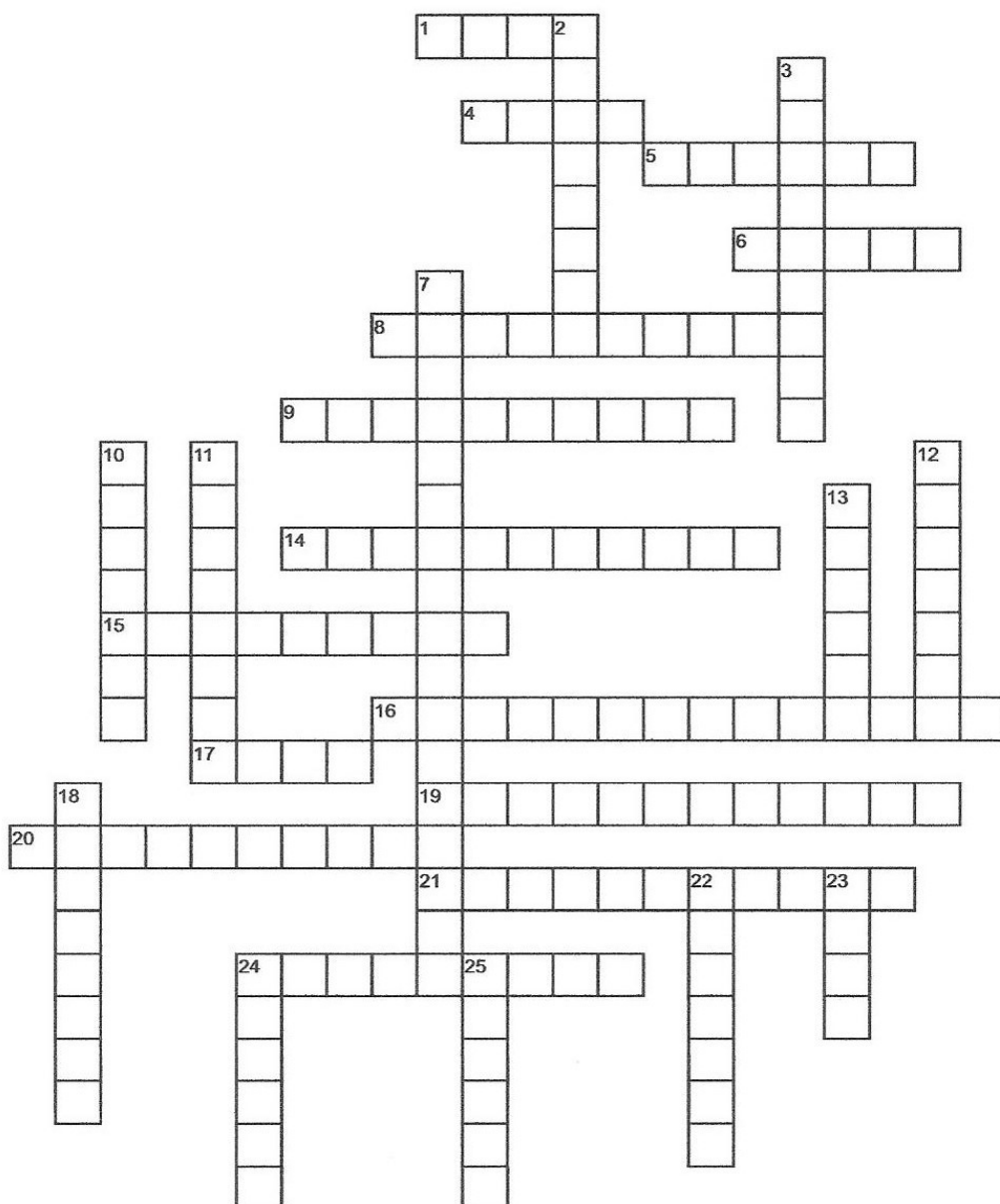


I have supported many different charities over the years but has fond and funny memories of the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust (HCPT). One such funny story was when I (as naval personnel) was attached as a helper to a group from Keighley, West Yorkshire on a visit to the holy city of Lourdes. One day whilst there visiting the Holy Beloved Grotto my duty was to push a young 8-year-old lad, James, who because of an incurable disease would probably not make 9 (he made it to 9 and a half).

Now James like all young boys could be quite mischievous, on this occasion I was pushing him in a wheelchair (although he didn't need it) explaining the significance of the grotto, as we got to the Holy shrine and the blessed waters James sat silently for a moment leapt to his feet and ran away leaving the whole crowd staring at me. I was dumbfounded, horrified, embarrassed and quickly surrounded with people calling out "Miracle".

I exited stage left as quickly as I could with an empty wheelchair and eventually found James in stitches in the park. Although upset at the time I have since seen the funny side ever since and vowed to always enjoy life while I can.

AOMC Xmas Crossword 2020



Across

- 1 Stanley - first AOMC accompanist
- 4 Orpheus's instrument
- 5 Tom - first Secretary of Abertillery Orpheus Male Choir
- 6 The Pope's folk song
- 8 A Welsh Music and Poetry Gathering
- 9 An Invitation
- 14 Location of 1921 Orpheus Juvenile Choir Music Festival success (8,3)
- 15 Canadian Glacier - site of impromptu concert
- 16 The Peacemakers (1,13)
- 17 A Cry
- 19 Trevor Wilde's choir role
- 20 First Conductor (3,7)
- 21 The Six foot Cinderella (6,5)
- 24 The Llanhilleth Male Choir

Down

- 2 Orpheus' Wife
- 3 A river in Virginia
- 7 Scottish Religious Building (8,9)
- 10 Ladies Choir accompanist for 40 years (3,4)
- 11 50 Year Man (4,4)
- 12 Vernon & Maryetta
- 13 Long serving accompanist was a Joy
- 18 Susan - 26 years a soprano soloist with the choir
- 22 Miss Greenway - Patron
- 23 A Japanese Shout
- 24 AOMC's 1997 Record title
- 25 Ivor, the conductor of both Orpheus Ladies and Male Choir

Hint: Some answers can be found on the AOMC Website

Recollections of a Fifty Year Man



Spring 1970 is when it all began, the place, the Oddfellows Hall Abertillery. In my mind's eye I can see it now, the long table at the far end of the hall where I sat totally enthralled and somewhat afraid of what I was seeing and hearing. I had been a member of a small glee party, but to be a prospective chorister with one of the big boys was rather daunting. However, the welcome I received that night soon set my mind at rest. A few weeks later, after an impromptu voice test, I was placed, much to my surprise, in the first tenor section where I remained for several months until moving in with the second tenors. Best to leave all that high note stuff to the Brylcream boys.

When I became a member in June 1970 Martin Budd had been the Musical Director for, I believe, about nine or ten months and, most ably assisted by a very fine accompanist in Joy Havard had begun to take the choir in a new direction. Gone were the blazers and greys, we now wore dress suits for concerts, and what concerts they were. With top class soloists from within the choir and guest artists who very often travelled with us we were more than just a choir, we were a self contained entertainment package. Artists such as Jaqueline Nelmes, Cheryl Grindle, Susan Robinson and Jill Padfield together with the madrigal group from Nantyglo comprehensive sixth form and even a barbershop quartet made up of members of the choir gave our concerts great variety.

In those days after concert functions were very often arranged during the first half of the concert by Roy Havard, choir secretary, and Ron Moore from Six Bells who seemed to be on almost every trip, always armed with a splendid supply of home-made welshcakes. The venue would then be announced during the interval.

Mention must be made of our continental tours. Germany, Holland and of course Italy, which came about by accident and where we almost acquired a new chorister, some Polish bloke in fancy clothes who unfortunately could not travel home with us due to work commitments. Pity, he had a very good baritone voice.

The year 2000 ,after a very successful tour of Canada, saw us bid fare well to Joy Havard, or Joy King as she was then, and Martin Budd as Musical Director. We as a choir were extremely fortunate in having a ready made replacement in Stephen Bard under who`s leadership we have continued to be in the foremost ranks of welsh male choirs. We also managed to find a superb accompanist in Penny Hughes.

Thinking back I have many wonderful memories such as singing Llef in someone`s front room in Birkenhead at one o`clock in the morning, or four of us singing Hugh Roberton`s "the old woman" in an underpass in Germany in the early hours of the morning, much to the confusion of a number of rough sleepers who were there.

It`s been a marvellous fifty years. The places I have visited, the people I have met, but most of all the men I have had the honour and privilege of knowing and sharing so much with. The friendship and comradeship I found in 1970 is still there.

Phil Hill.

Weary Wild Walkers Update

There has been a request for the WWW to organise short monthly walks for members who are unable to complete the more arduous paths we follow. We are happy to do this but there are some caveats. All walkers must be able to complete at least five miles at a reasonable walking pace (which may include some ascents), have appropriate walking shoes/boots and clothing (for all types of weather), and have or share transport to the start points.

I have mentioned before walking is one of life`s pleasurable experiences and can be enjoyed by everyone. Before we go any further with this request though, would those interested please confirm by email at:

michael.bishop8@btinternet.com

Mick Bishop

2020 review by Choir Secretary

Dear all

This year has been a year we would rather forget but one we will doubtless remember.

The year got off to a tremendous start and we had a full calendar of exciting engagements in front of us. The tour of Kent was again a success and we returned just in the nick of time before the first lockdown - our last sing out!

The rest as they say is now history. We have in this time endeavoured, as a management committee to stay in touch with all choristers to keep the camaraderie going and to keep in touch with everyone. This and the previous newsletters are an effort towards that end. We hope it has in some way lightened up what has been a difficult year.

We hope 2021 will bring better times and a return to singing. We must make the best of what we have and adapt perhaps to an electronic Covid Christmas With zooms and video apps in our Christmas stockings. The future is still uncertain but a jab in the arm is on the horizon.

Lastly I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happier new year

Gareth.
Secretary AOMC

