

Tommy Walker (events director)

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Thomas Luttgen Walker (November 8, 1922 – October 20, 1986) was an American producer of live entertainment events who was director of entertainment at Disneyland during its first twelve years of operation, and later produced spectacular events at celebrations including three Olympic Games and the centennial of the Statue of Liberty.

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Life and times

Tommy Walker was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His father, Vesey Walker, was "a band director who, according to a Disneyland press release from 1967, organized more than 50 college, military, school and youth bands. His local American Legion from Wisconsin won an international competition in 1934, with 11-year-old Tommy as a member."

As "Tommy the Toe", the University of Southern California Trojan marching band's drum major, Walker would tear off his uniform jacket, throw his baton to the ground and rush from the stands onto the field to kick conversions for the cardinal and gold. The fans adored Walker, as did the media. To one sportswriter, Walker was "The Caliph of Conversion."

In 1947, a picture of Walker wearing a tall white shako as he booted a football appeared in *LIFE* magazine and was widely published elsewhere.

The "Charge"

A decorated veteran of World War II, Walker returned to USC as a junior in the fall of 1946 and found the football team in need of a lift. He wrote a six-note fanfare for the trumpet section: "Da da da DUT da DUH!" Trojan rooters then screamed, "Charge!"

In the decades since, the origin of the fanfare has been obscured. At times it seemed that those six notes—Da da da DUT da DUH—might have resounded through the primordial mist and propelled ancient Olympians and Roman charioteers to great feats. It is hard to imagine a modern college football game—or, for that matter, almost any other US sporting contest—being played without that familiar fanfare in the background.

Walker once told the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* that he introduced the trumpet call at a band practice. "I played a few notes on the trumpet -- Da-da-da-DAH-da-DAH -- and the band yelled, 'Trojan warriors, charge!'" he said. "It seemed kind of effective, so we decided to try it that Saturday."

Somewhere between band practice and the game, someone decided to drop the "Trojan warriors" and simply yell "Charge!" The band introduced Charge on a third-and-one, and the Trojans responded by gaining the first down. "It was an immediate hit," Walker said.

In 1958 that Charge exploded. That year the Brooklyn Dodgers moved to Los Angeles. Yes, the Dodger management owes much to that clarion cry. In the spring of 1959 the Dodgers put on sale, at \$1.50 apiece, 20,000 toy trumpets, all of which played one tune: "Da da da DUT da DUH." The song really took off after NBC's broadcasts of Games 3, 4 and 5 of the 1959 World Series, between the Dodgers and the Chicago White Sox.

After the '59 Series that famous trumpet call was appropriated by nearly every team in the country that had a fan with willing lips and a bugle. It is easy to forget the special relationship Charge has with Los Angeles.

"It's part of our tradition," says Dr. Arthur C. Bartner, the current band director at USC. "We always play it when there's a third-down situation."

Placekicking drum major

Walker concluded that leading the band and finishing his studies weren't going to keep him busy enough. To fill his schedule, he asked Trojan football coach Jeff Cravath for a tryout as the placekicker. Cravath gave the O.K., and in 1947 Walker broke the Pacific Coast Conference record for conversions in a season. He made 19 of 29 attempts to bury the 16-year-old record of 14.

Walker didn't abandon the band, however. He wore no pads under his football uniform, and at halftime, because he was not needed in the locker room, he would slip on his drum major's uniform and a shako and lead the band. On November 8, 1947, Walker's 25th birthday, Cravath allowed the Toe to lead the band during its pregame show. That day the Trojans played Stanford at the Coliseum. After leading the band in "Fight On", Walker kicked two PATs in a 14-0 victory. He relinquished his band duties for the Rose Bowl game against Michigan and stood idly on the sidelines as the Wolverines defeated the Trojans 49-0.

USC band director

After he graduated, in the spring of 1948 Washington Redskins owner George Preston Marshall offered him a tryout, but Walker chose instead to become the assistant band director at his alma mater. Eventually he became the director of the USC band, which was hailed as "The Toast of the Coast." In 1955 Walt Disney saw USC's halftime show at the Rose Bowl and invited Walker to create the opening ceremony for Disneyland.

Disney Director of Entertainment

Walker left USC and became the Magic Kingdom's first director of entertainment and customer relations. Disney used to tease Walker, "Everything you do is fireworks, balloons, pigeons and flags." Certainly these were four key elements in the extravaganzas Walker was known for. Walker's father, Vesey (honored as a Disney Legend in 2005), formed the original Disneyland Band.

Private business

In 1966 Walker left Disneyland and began a production company to put on the same kind of spectacles he had created for Disney. He directed the opening and closing ceremonies for three Olympics and had a hand in the festivities for five World's Fairs and two presidential inaugurations (including Ronald Reagan's in 1981). He directed the halftimes at three Super Bowls, 11 Pro Bowls, and World's Fairs in four cities. At California's Anaheim Stadium he produced several "Fourth of July Spectaculars" in the 1960s and 70s, as well as opening ceremonies for the stadium, the Anaheim Convention Center, and the Ontario Motor Speedway. In 1968 he produced "Teen Time USA," a youth-oriented event at the Anaheim Convention Center featuring popular performers like The Doors. He also directed the fireworks that highlighted the Statue of Liberty's centennial celebration on the Fourth of July 1986. In an obituary, the *New York Times* reported that "One of his last outdoor productions was Harvard University's 350th anniversary celebration in September [of that year]. His company, Tommy Walker Productions, was recently bought by Radio City Music Hall Productions, which is based in Manhattan. At his death, Mr. Walker was executive producer for special events for Radio City Music Hall Productions." Along with Robert (Bob) Jani and Andrea Elizabeth Michaels, he is considered an event industry pioneer.

Death

In October 1986, Walker died on an operating table in Birmingham, Alabama, where he was undergoing his third round of open heart surgery in ten years. "He was an absolute dynamo of a man," wife Lucille Walker said. (She continued for a period with Radio City Music Hall Productions and produced the Pre-Liturgy for the Papal visit of Pope John Paul II at Dodger Stadium on September 16, 1987.) Funeral services for Walker were held on October 25, 1986 at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, with Rev. Robert A. Schuller presiding and solos by Etta James. His remains are interred at Pacific View Memorial Park in nearby Newport Beach.

References and sources

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