



Photo by Karl Weisel

Lynyrd Skynyrd perform in an aircraft hangar against a backdrop of Old Glory.

Rockin' Rhein Main

Lynyrd Skynyrd treat DoD soldiers and civilians to a free high-octane concert

By David Ruderman
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

The Stars and Stripes was more in evidence than the Stars and Bars when southern rockers Lynyrd Skynyrd took the stage at Rhein-Main Airbase June 12 in a free concert for service members and their families. Some 5,000 soldiers, air men, family members and civilians thronged around Hangar 38 for the two-hour show that was broadcast live to U.S. forces around the world over the American Forces Network.

'Honor to play'

"It's an honor for us to be here and play for you," lead singer Johnny Van Zant told an enthusiastic audience that rocked to the sound of such familiar tunes as "Simple Man," "Gimme Three Steps," "That Smell" and "What's Your Name."

"Without you we'd be nowhere. We love you. God bless you. And Lynyrd Skynyrd is one band that honors our president," he said.

The sound and the sentiment were familiar to Staff Sgt. Steve Shepard. "I grew up in Florida, southern Georgia, and I listened mostly to southern rock when I was coming up," said the 501st Military Intelligence soldier detailed to the European Command in Stuttgart,

who drove up for the concert. "It was like something you could reach out to, the southern rock influence. It took me till I was in the military that I learned to have more appreciation for others. And I appreciate bands that show their support to the military, especially in these times," he said.

Lynyrd Skynyrd formed in 1964 when high school students Ronnie Van Zant, Gary Rossington and Allen Collins put together a garage band in Jacksonville, Fla. The unusual name is a parody of Leonard Skinner, a gym teacher who berated them for their rock and roll ways. Winning a local talent contest led to a gig as the opening act for Strawberry Alarm Clock and the recording of their first record album in 1973.



Photo by Karl Weisel

An airman enjoys a lofty view of the proceedings at Rhein Main Airbase.

Early hits such as "Freebird" and "Sweet Home Alabama," and the band's unapologetic "redneck" attitude won them a place in the southern rock wave of bands spearheaded by the Allman Brothers.

Tough times

Several years of touring and recording found Lynyrd Skynyrd poised to break out nationally. Their 1977 album "Street Survivors" went gold immediately upon release, but tragedy struck the band a mere three days later on Oct. 20, 1977. On tour to promote the new record, Skynyrd's private plane crashed into a Mississippi swamp while on a flight from Greenville, S.C., to Baton Rouge, La., killing lead singer Ronnie Van Zant, guitarist Steve Gaines and his sister, backup singer



Photo by David Ruderman

Lynyrd Skynyrd fans show their appreciation for the hard-rocking tunes courtesy of the band at Rhein Main Airbase June 12. Several thousand spectators turned out for the free concert.

Cassie Gaines, the flight crew and a road manager. Other members of the band and its entourage were badly injured.

Surviving members went on with separate musical careers, but Lynyrd Skynyrd's fan base never faded. A greatest hits recording went multi-platinum in 1980. A 1987 tribute tour brought together surviving members fronted by Van Zant's brother, Johnny Van Zant. Skynyrd has released half a dozen albums since 1990 and the Rhein-Main show kicked off the band's European tour to promote their most recent effort, "Vicious Cycle."

"I'm here with my dad," said 12-year-old Caitlin Smith from Vogelweh. "We listen to their songs all the time on the radio and CDs."

"It's awesome. It sounds like they're actually on a CD. It doesn't distort anything," said Spc. Kathleen Robinson, 272nd Military Police Company, who drove up from Mannheim to hear the show.

"It's the greatest southern rock band that ever lived," said her husband, Spc. Joey Robinson, of 560th MP Company.

"And I agree," said Kathleen.

"I just like them," said Spc. Scott Galbraith of Company C, 123rd Main Support Battalion, from Dexheim.

For many in the crowd the show delivered the bittersweet poignancy of enjoying the music while missing loved ones deployed to the Middle East. Their hearts on their sleeves, caught between laughing and crying, most decided to dance rather than mourn.

"I love it," said Spc. Arin Gillmore of Company C, 123rd MSB. "I think Lynyrd Skynyrd is pretty badass. I'm kind of a hippie myself—it took me two years to join the Army because I had to wear leather boots—but Skynyrd is great." Gillmore was on hand as much to send her love to her fiancée, John Barclay, serving at the moment somewhere in Iraq, as to rock.

"Tell him I love him," she said.

'I miss him'

Pfc. Katrina Elizabeth, Company B, 123rd MSB, was thinking of her husband, Jeremiah Anderson of 2-37th Armor from Friedberg, also on duty in Iraq. "I love him and I miss him. Be safe," she said.

"Helping each other out—that's what it's all about," Van Zant told the audience. Skynyrd closed the show with an extended jam of their signature tune, "Freebird."

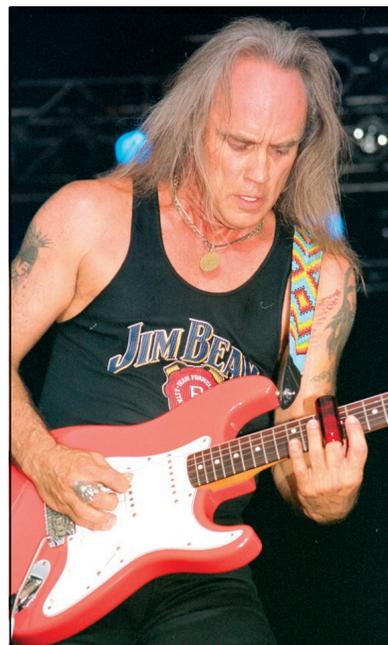


Photo by Dennis Johnson

Rickey Medlocke lays down some tasty slide guitar during one of Lynyrd Skynyrd's signature songs.



Photo by Karl Weisel

Lead singer Johnny Van Zant (center) and his bandmates tear through a smoking version of "Gimme Three Steps."



Photo by Karl Weisel

AFN's Leon Blair and the 104th ASG Marketing's Katrina McConnell warm up the crowd with a live broadcast before the concert.



Photo by David Ruderman

Spc. Jordan Palys (left), Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 104th Area Support Group, the youngest soldier in the command, and Chaplain (Col.) John H. McRae, 104th ASG chaplain, the most senior, cut a cake to mark the Army's 228th birthday on Hanau's Yorkhof Kaserne.

Army birthday

Communities worldwide observe 228th anniversary

David Ruderman
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Army communities worldwide and the nation at large marked the Army's 228th birthday June 13. The Army's role in securing America's independence and liberty since before the founding of the republic shared the spotlight with its current role in enforcing national policy in Iraq.

"We've been around ever since the beginning of our nation, which is appropriate," said Lt. Col. Howard L. Malone, 104th Area Support Group provost marshal, in a ceremony held at the ASG's headquarters on Yorkhof Kaserne in Hanau.

The Army's military strength was a necessary prerequisite for achieving liberty in the War of Independence and has been indispensable to preserving it ever since. "It's just a lot of talk if you don't have the horsepower to back it up," he said.

"The Army has been in every nasty, sandy, swampy or cold place on earth defending the God-given rights of people to be who they want to be, to have a family and be free. And we're all part of that. It's a great heritage, a great

history, and it's an honor. People like us don't think of ourselves as heroes on a day-to-day basis, just doing our jobs. But when you look at the picture, put it in terms of the freedoms and way of life the Army supports, it is a big deal," said Malone.

"Take a few minutes today to think about the big picture, about the role that we are playing in it. And let us remember our fellow soldiers who have sacrificed for our nation and our principles. It literally has been millions of people over the last two centuries who have given up their lives to preserve our freedoms."

Malone's remarks were followed by a cake-cutting ceremony. Spc. Jordan Palys, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 104th Area Support Group, participated as the youngest soldier in the command, and Chaplain (Col.) John H. McRae, 104th ASG chaplain, as the most senior.

"I guess I kind of feel privileged to be part of something so big," said Palys.

The 60 soldiers and civilians attending enjoyed refreshments and each other's company before returning to their missions.