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# Sound-off! An Introduction to the Study of American Military Marching Cadences

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF AMERICAN MILITARY MARCHING CADENCES

A Thesis Presented

by

TRAVIS G. SALLEY

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Department of Music and Dance

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Approved as to style and content by:

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## DEDICATION

To Rachel.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

SOUND-OFF!

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MAY 2015

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Cadences are call and response marching songs sung by military personnel during drill and ceremony. This music originated in the United States in 1943 and has spread to militaries across the world. It is typically heard at basic training installations where it is used to help resocialize trainees into soldiers and during unit physical training. The lyrics of cadences often engage with facts of military culture: exploring the reality of combat and military life, instilling motivation, and developing unit cohesion.

Scholarship in this field displays significant gaps when it comes to the development of the military cadence, which my thesis intends to address. Army historians, who have written extensively about cadences, discuss drill and ceremony practices from the Revolution and Civil War, but then they immediately jump to the Duckworth Chant (the modern origins of cadence in 1943). Any discussion of African

American musical idioms, which I argue provide the foundation of the cadence, is curiously absent.

In addition to constructing the first detailed historical narrative of military cadences, my thesis will address the political and cultural ramifications of the texts of these songs. Cadences have had a tendency to be sexist, homophobic, and/or racist, especially those used in combat units. The military does not actively regulate the use of cadences, but anecdotal evidence seems to point to the fact that within the last few decades, senior military leaders have quietly urged soldiers to use more appropriate subject matter while singing cadences. These policies have correlated with the increase of female participation in the military and a general cultural shift in the military and in society at large.

Soldiers commonly describe cadences as a powerful experience that they remember for the rest of their lives. If cadences have such an impact on a soldier's life—especially during the resocialization process from civilian to warrior—and if cadences are known to be sexist, homophobic, and/or racist, this raises the question of how cadences themselves might impact or reflect the culture of the military.

The purpose of this thesis is introduce the historical context of the origins of cadence, understand the musical parameters of its performance, and attempt to understand its impact on military culture.

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# PREFACE

The existing literature on military marching chants ("cadences") displays significant gaps in its engagement with the history of this musical form. In fact, the scholarship I have studied often comments on this very gap, noting the dearth of historical evidence that has been accumulated on this subject. Surprisingly enough, the two most obvious lineages of marching cadences—Euro-American war songs and the West-African Call and Response tradition—have both engendered major scholarly conversations; yet, the question of how these traditions made their way into military folk music remains unanswered. Since military cadences share their roots with other forms of American music, why has there been so little research on this musical tradition, which is as American as Jazz and Rock n' Roll? The lack of significant scholarship may be related to the difficulty of studying cadences from either a purely musicological or a purely ethnomusicological standpoint.

Fortunately, musicology now regularly discusses styles outside of western art music; however, cadences have remained on the periphery of the field. This is puzzling, as cadences have been referenced in pop-culture for over 50 years. Although musicologists are expanding their purview, cadences have only been tacitly discussed. In many ways, marching cadences are a part of the western tradition; yet they fall well outside the canonic repertoire of musicologists. The legacy of musicological frameworks certainly explains why there are not substantive scholarly inquiries into military marching cadences from music's flagship academic discipline.

Ethnomusicologists should be much more attuned to the study of marching cadences, as they tend to study music *outside* of the western-art music tradition. More broadly, they are concerned with documenting and preserving music of “other” cultures that is often functional in nature. Much of the time, this music is part of an oral tradition (much like cadences), yet I have not found any ethnomusicological work on this repertoire. It may have to do with the nature of this tradition–it is a part of a military sub-culture that is not readily accessible to scholars; basic training (where cadence is more frequently practiced) is not the most welcoming environment for the inquisitive civilian researcher.

The development of the cadence’s form and its cultural history are inextricably linked; yet, the literature has been insufficient in resolving the question of how cadences became a fully developed musical idiom. This thesis seeks to fully understand the history, musicality, and cultural impact of military cadences. Documenting the structure, forms, performance practices, and styles of this tradition is not only important for the sake of music scholarship, but also to better understand the cultural history of the U.S. Armed Forces.

## Author's Note

It is relevant to share that I am a participant-observer of my own research. I have served in the Army for over four years and am now a commissioned officer. I have both participated and called marching cadences with my own soldiers.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE MODERN MARCHING CADENCE

*The march of columns is an operation so often repeated, and of so much consequence, that it must be considered as an essential article in the instruction of both officers and men… The whole column must always begin to march, and halt, at the same time, and only by the order of the commanding officer.* [1]
*-Baron von Stuben*

Near the break of dawn every day, service members from across the world take part in a unique American music tradition: the military marching cadence. Millions of service members across the generations have engaged in this tradition. It is a ubiquitous part of the daily life of a soldier, but it is also a (sub)-cultural hegemon in its own right. Allied nations across the world have taken notice of the power of US military marching cadences and have instituted them within their own militaries.[2] In spite of this clear recognition of the cultural power wielded by cadences, they are largely an underground tradition; they remain mostly unknown by lay person and scholar alike. Outside of military culture, cadences are mostly conceived as cliché, typified in pop culture as a simplistic antiphon between battle-hardened sergeants and confused privates, featured in such films as *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Officer and a Gentleman (1982), Stripes (1981),* and even Sponge-Bob Square-Pants. Here is a short excerpt of what is perhaps the easily recognizable cadence:

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[1] See Friedrich Kapp, *Life of Frederick William von Steuben* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1859), 202. This book has the complete translation of Steuben's "Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States." This is one of the most important military treatises in military history-as it was crucial for the success of the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War.

[2] David LoConto, "The Diaspora of West Africa: The Influence of West African Cultures on Jody Calls in the United States Military," *Sociological Spectrum* 30, no. 1 (2010): 102-103.

Sound off! (one, two)
Sound off! (three, four)
Break-it on down (one, two three, four, one, two- threefour!)

So what are military marching cadences? At the most basic level, they are call and response work songs sung by military personnel engaging in uniformed movement. Functionally, cadences are meant to keep soldiers in-step with the beat dictated by the caller of the cadence and with each other. This is meant to keep soldiers from stepping over one another and to keep a uniform appearance as a cohesive unit. This is also known as close-order drill—a marching ritual that develops and showcases unit cohesion and discipline. Cadences are a part of a larger process of resocializing soldiers from civilians into warriors who are ready for battle and for confronting the harsh realities of military life.

The basic training experience is filled with food and sleep deprivation; isolation from family, friends, and technology; and constant barrage of stress coupled with no power over life back home. Drill sergeants' main goal is to transform civilians into soldiers who can handle these circumstances by fostering teamwork and esprit de corps, discipline, and rigorous training. Cadence is the tool that hammers these concepts together.

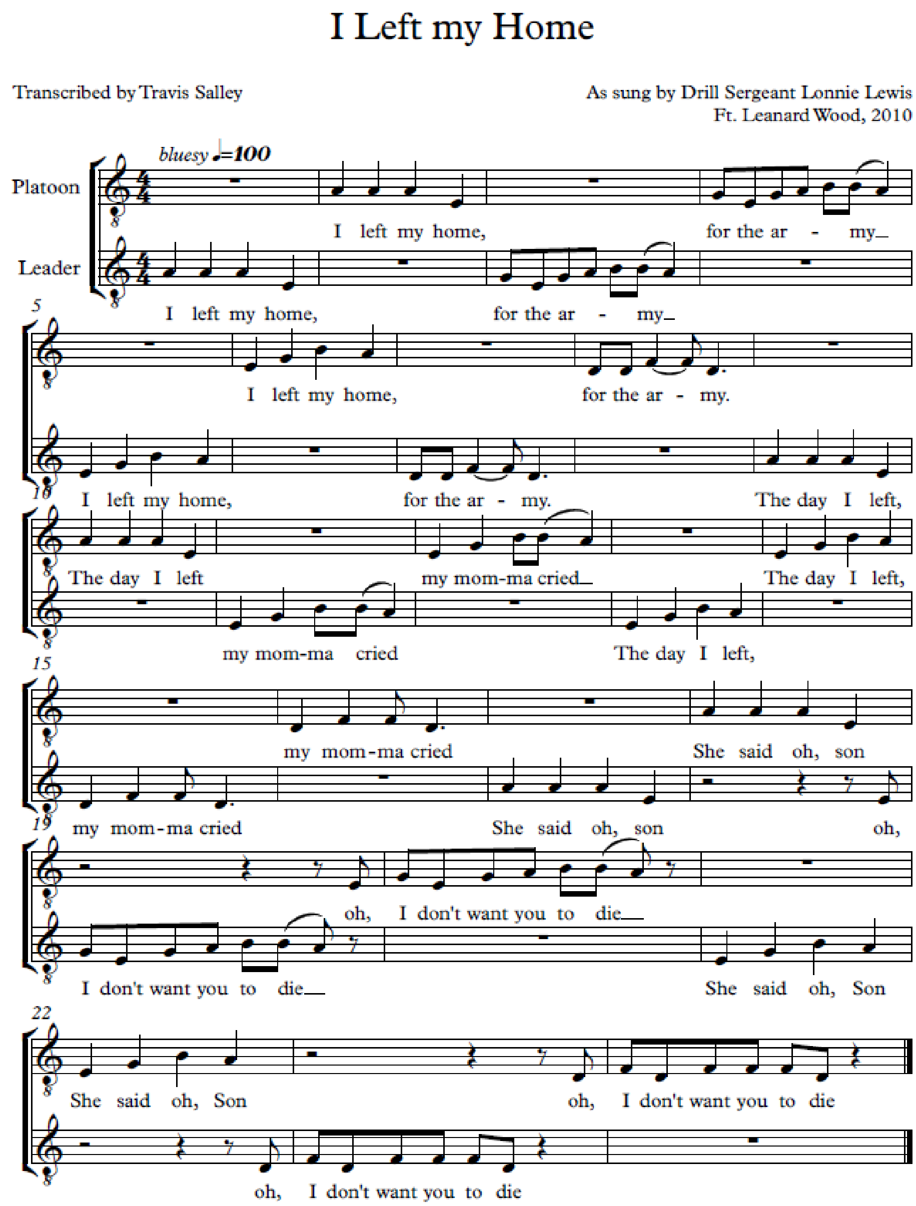
Soldiers often speak of transcending their brutal training into a more euphoric state of mind through the communal act of singing cadences. The most common instances where this music is performed are while running in formation (often for many miles) or marching from one basic training event to another (this also can be for many miles). For generations, these marches have been times of deep reflection for soldiers. Marching cadences often express feelings of collective struggle and heartache, much like their slave and prison song predecessors. Here is an example of a reflective marching cadence I recollect from my basic training experience:


**Figure 1.1: "I left my home"**

Cadences come in two distinct categories: marching and running. These differ greatly in terms of tempo, text, form, style, and performance practice. Marching and running cadences are primarily sung by drill instructors and privates in Initial Entry Training (IET).[3] They are also heard throughout the country at most universities during Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) training.[4] Typically, marching cadences are not heard outside of IET or ROTC, whereas running cadences are common throughout the military. In essence, cadences are an important part of initial training for both enlisted and officers.

Peculiarly, cadences are one of the few areas of military training that are not actively regulated in the US military. The US Army's field manual for Drill and Ceremony makes no mention of any military songs or marching cadences. The manual only mentions how to keep a soldier in step by counting "ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR; ONE, TWO THREE, FOUR" and states that while running, "the procedures are basically the same."[5] The experience of marching and running while counting to four is about as interesting as it is to read that description. However, the manual does state, "when marching, soldiers will be allowed to sing, or a drummer's beat may provide cadence."[6]

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[3] Initial entry training is the combination of basic combat training and advanced individual training (AIT). AIT is where soldiers learn their MOS or Military Occupational Specialty-their job in the army after completing basic combat training. Although AIT students are soldiers, they are still treated as new privates in the army. The lifestyle in AIT is very similar to that of BCT, but generally far less intense. As of 2006, Drill Sergeants were no longer authorized as primary instructors of AIT but soldiers still march and run regularly. See http://www.army.mil/article/66502/The_New_Phase_of_the_AIT_Platoon_Sergeant_Course/ for more details.

[4] Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) is the most common initial entry program for officers. They learn the same basic soldiering tasks as their enlisted counterparts, but in a much more low-key environment, mostly stemming from the fact that they are full-time students. Marching and running cadences are an important part of their training, but they are practiced far less often than new enlisted soldiers.

[5] Jack Jacobs, *Surviving Boot Camp and Basic Training* (New York: St. Martin's Press 2012), 72.

[6] Department of the Army, *Drill and Ceremonies,* Field Manual 3-21.5 (Washington, D.C.: US Army Infantry School, 2006) 2-8.

Surprisingly, there is no guidance about what or how to sing. Naturally, without a specific regulation, soldiers have exploited this loophole and created a wide array of texts and musical styles varying from inspiring to horrifically violent.

Marching cadences can motivate, excite, and instill pride within their branch of service. This has been true since the origin of the US Military. As stated in the Drill and Ceremony Manual, "the objectives accomplished by drill — teamwork, confidence, pride, alertness, attention to detail, esprit de corps, and discipline — are just as important to the modern Army as they were to the Continental Army."[7]

[7] Ibid. 1-2.

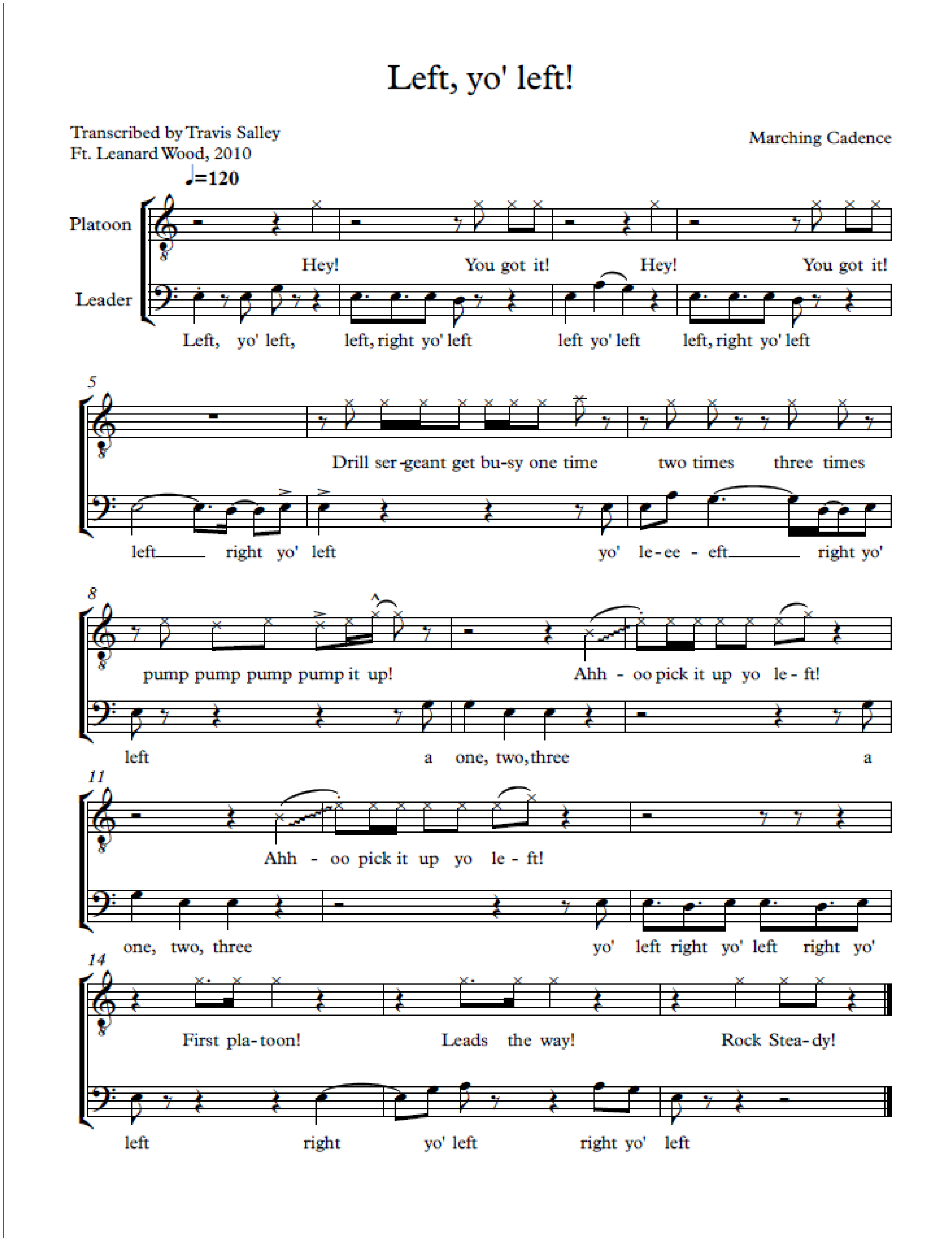


**Figure: 1.2: "Left, yo' left!"**

# CHAPTER 2

# HISTORY OF THE CADENCE

*I don't believe we can have an army without music.*[8]

*-Robert E. Lee*

## Introduction

Cadences are in some ways a bi-racial tradition. They incorporate elements from African American musical culture, such as swing rhythm and call and response; and we can also see the influence of march-like rhythms from Euro-American war songs. However, I would argue that the musical characteristics that grew out of African American music are by far the most integral part of the cadence aesthetic. In their usage, military marching cadences are most closely aligned with African American slave and prison songs. Cadences often are reflective of the laborious and physically demanding lifestyle of those who sing them, much like slave and prison songs.[9] Where slave music was a mechanism to cope with the oppressive environment of slavery, similarly, military

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[8] Bell Irvin Wiley, *Life of Johnny Reb* (New York: The Bobbs-Merill, 1943), 157.
[9] See William Francis Allen, *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: Agathynian Press, 1867). This work appears to be the first and most significant publication of African American slave music. The book explains in great detail the performance practice and style of slave music. Specifically, pages 43-44 discuss call and response and how the leader may "invent verses" during the performance. These are key similarities with cadences.

cadences grew from a music tradition that reflected the specific plight of black soldiers in the military.[10]

Correspondence, military regulations, and other texts from US military conflicts provide tantalizing details about the history of marching cadences. But because most of this history is rooted in traditions passed on orally by poor, often illiterate servicemen, much of it was never recorded. This is especially true of African American Soldiers, who in addition to general illiteracy, the written record of their culture (particularly during the revolution was has been hampered by the white mainstream's indifference to black cultural history).[11] This section is meant to synthesize these sources into one cohesive historical narrative.

## Music and Marching in History

The prevalence of marching drill training can be dated to at least Antiquity. The importance of staying in step was known throughout the ancient world, though the Roman Historian Vegetius has most famous articulation of this fact:

[10] LoConto, "The Diaspora of West Africa," 106. Similarities between slave music, West-African music, and cadences are explored in this article. Specifically, he highlights six similarities shared by those three traditions: call and response, focus on the voice, percussion backbeat to create energy, functionality in nature, focus on the experience of daily living, and the oral tradition. However, he does not discuss how the tradition made its way into the military.

[11] See Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 6. A leading 20th-century scholar of African American music, she repeatedly discusses the issues of racism at work in the documentation of "black" music. Problems in the documentation of African American music are also discussed in J.H. Kwabena Knetia, "The Study of African and Afro-American Music," *The Black Perspective in Music* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 8.

> *The first thing the soldiers are to be taught is the military step, which can only be acquired by constant practice of marching quick and together. Nor is anything of more consequence either on the march or in the line than that they should keep their ranks with the greatest exactness. For troops who march in an irregular and disorderly manner are always in great danger of being defeated.*[12]

A key difference from modern military drill is that the Romans did not use music to keep in-step; however, much like contemporary marching chants, music was used to help build motivation and cohesiveness. The technique for Roman Chanting was called the *barritus*, which was a rousing war cry derived from an elephant's trumpet. The troops would start their chant in unison very quietly and would gradually become louder and louder until a climatic shout.[13]

The European tradition of keeping soldiers in-step with music can be dated to 15th century Switzerland. This is where the fife and drumming originated. In fact fifes are also known as *Schweizerpfeife* or "the swiss flute". During this time, drum and fife became codified throughout Europe with one fifer and 2 drummers per 100 men (also known as a company). When multiple companies formed into a regiment, so did the fife and drummers, who formed a regimental band. This has been the western European standard ever since. The American fife and drummers are direct descendants of this tradition.

During the revolutionary period, military songs were not formally incorporated into marching drill training. Although soldiers did often sing war songs while marching,

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[12] Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *De Re Militari (Concerning Military Affairs)*, trans. by John Clark (Seattle: Praetorian Press, 2011). The Romans were also interested in making sure the soldiers were physically fit as well. "They should march with the common military step twenty miles in five summer-hours, and with the full step, which is quicker, twenty-four miles in the same number of hours." These standards are most impressive, even by today's military standards. Vegetius also describes the importance of running in order to be able to effectively charge the enemy and conduct reconnaissance. These are principles that are still reflective of modern militaries.

**[13]** Yann Bohec, *The Encyclopedia of the Roman Army*. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015).The information about Roman military customs comes from the treatise *De Re Military* by Falvius Vegetius. This book was immensely popular with European militaries during the middle ages.

the songs did not serve the specific function of ensuring that the soldiers stay in step, which is a key characteristic of modern cadence.[14] This responsibility was allocated to the drummer and fifers. Ensuring accurate and precise marching execution was not taught by song, but by a vocal chant called, “hay-foot, straw-foot.”[15]

Most literature on cadences cites as historical precedent this well-known training technique of placing a piece of hay in a soldier’s left shoe and a piece of straw in his right shoe. Then, the soldier would be able to associate his left and right during a march while the drill sergeant would chant, “hay-foot, straw-foot.”[16] There is no doubt that this practice was probably necessitated by the general illiteracy of the continental army.

The earliest mention of this technique is an 1851 edition of *Knickerboxer,* a 19th century New York literary magazine which reads:

[14] See Jack Jacobs, *Basic: Surviving Boot Camp and Basic Training* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2012), 71. The literature is frustratingly quiet on the question of “marching songs” and how they impacted the soldiers’ step. It would seem inevitable that soldiers would end up marching in step by the natural beat of the music. Army Historian Col. Jack Jacobs suggests that marching songs of the Revolution and Civil War were not used like cadences but rather for entertainment and morale purposes while in route-step (informal marching). This is also discussed in the personal correspondence of Civil War officer Thomas Higginson in, “Army Life in a Black Regiment,” in *Readings of Black American Music,* ed. Eileen Southern. (New York: Norton & Company, 1983) 177. His discussion of soldiers singing during a “route-step march” suggests that it was a normal event for military units.

[15] The first established manual on drill and ceremony assigns buglers and drummers in different amounts to different companies. What is curiously missing from the manual is the method of execution for the musicians. This is probably due to the fact that the typical soldier was not concerned with them andit  was left to the musicians to work out.

[16] The question of this marching technique being considered a “marching cadence” seems to be a matter of controversy. Army Historian Sandee Johnson argues (in *Cadences: The Jody Call Book* (Canton: Daring Press, 1983)), that it is the “first American cadence.” Musicologist Jennifer Kandaki (in “Sweating, Swearing, and Singing: Cadences as United States Military Culture,” University of Cincinnati, 1997. 6), claims Johnson is “incorrect” in her attribution. She believes the first cadence lies with the Willie Duckworth Chant (see page 7). This disagreement speaks to the difficulty of how cadences are defined. In any case, there does seem to be a universal agreement “hay foot straw foot” is an important predecessor to the cadences of today.

> *In these affrays* [being forced to vote], *poor 'Brommy'* [an apparent nickname for an unfortunate Dutchman who was actively recruited and harassed into voting] *…would sometimes be rather roughly handled… This however was not 'Brommy's' only affliction. He was obliged to 'train' too. At company-training and general-training, Brommy was duly 'warned'… But it was all 'hay-foot, straw-foot' with him.*[17]

What's fascinating about this account is that the phrase "hay-foot, straw-foot" is being used as an idiomatic expression, at least in the sense that it is not being used to describe actual military training, but rather, metaphorically, to describe how to make someone conform to standards while using simple minded methods. This suggests that the phrase must have been around for some time in order for the average reader to be able to understand it. If so, this supports the general assumption that the "hay-foot, straw-foot" technique existed in the early part of the 19th century, if not the Revolution. In any case, the use of this technique was widely known during the Civil War. In fact, the common nickname for green recruits was "strawfoot."[18]

The Civil War marks an important turning point in American music history. This new war sparked an influx of new music by American composers who wrote music for both the Union and the Confederacy. Musicologist Kent Bowman argues that an "American aesthetic" fully emerged during this time period because composers who were born after the Revolution were coming of age and in the prime of their careers.[19] This is in direct contrast to the popular tunes of the Revolution, which were commonly British,

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[17] Editor's Table, *Knickerboxer* XXXVIII, 1851. 74.

[18] Bruce Catton, "Hayfoot, Strawfoot!," *American Heritage* 8, no. 3 (April 1957): 1. The idiomatic use of "hay-foot, straw-foot" can be found as late as 1911 in Henry Sydnor Harrison, *Queed* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1911) 12.

[19] Kent, Bowman. *Voice of Combat: A Century of Liberty and War Songs, 1765-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1987), 92.

such as “Yankee Doodle” and “The Liberty Song.”[20] The texts of Civil War music make clear that composers wanted to evoke nationalism, belittle the enemy, and probably make a buck or two. In the context of activating civic pride, Abraham Lincoln once commented to George Root, one of the Union’s most prolific composers, “You have done more than a hundred generals and a thousand orators.”[21]

The subject matter of these songs was quite varied. Some of the songs focused on the mundane such as the general lack of food, or the unseemliness of the officers. Others discussed wartime leaders, slavery, pride and victory, and the shock of defeat:

*The wounded men were crying*
*for help from everywhere,*
*While others, who were dying*
*Were offering God their prayer*[22]

Undoubtedly, the most recognizable Civil War song is the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” by Julia Ward Howe, which helped shift public perception of the Civil War from a secular struggle to a more sacred “crusade against slavery.”[23] While the original is very much a protestant hymn, African American soldiers often wrote their own texts to the tune, which often departed significantly from the original. Here are perhaps the most well-known of these:

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[20] See J.A. Leo Lemay, “The American Origins of ‘Yankee Doodle,’ ” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (July 1976): 435. Lemay suggests the most popular song of the Revolution, “Yankee Doodle,” may have American origins. However, it is generally accepted the piece was written by an English Army Officer to mock the continental army. Even so, another popular song, “The Liberty Song,” was composed over the anthem of the Royal Navy by John Dickinson. Considering the colonies were inextricably British, it is not surprising that their music would be as well.
[21] Robert Branham, *Sweet Freedom’s Song: “My Country ‘tis of Thee” and Democracy in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 132.
[22] Bowman, *Voice of Combat*, 122.
[23] David Walls, “Song of the First Arkansas Colored Regiment: A Contested Attribution,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (Winter, 2007): 401.

*We are done with hoeing cotton, we are done with hoeing corn,*
*We are colored Yankee soldiers, as sure as you are born;*
*When Massa hears us shouting, he will think 'tis Gabriel's horn,*
*As we go marching on.*

*Glory, glory hallelujah.*
*Glory, glory hallelujah.*
*Glory, glory hallelujah.*
*As we go marching on.*

*Then fall in, colored brethren, you'd better do it soon,*
*Don't you hear the drum a-beating the Yankee Doodle tune?*
*We are with you know this morning, we'll be far away at noon,*
*As we go marching on.*[24]

The replacement of Howe's lyrics with ones improvised by African American soldiers is an important predecessor to the development of marching cadences because it is the earliest verifiable integration of African American and white music in the US Military.[25] Since it can be demonstrated that from at least the Civil War there was a musical space in which African American soldiers could improvise and recompose white war songs, then it is reasonable to suggest that this may be an important mark for the development of marching cadences that continued through the First World War.

The book *Songs My Mother Never Taught Me* (1929) provides an important clue about the African American music tradition in the military during WWI. It claims to be a comprehensive collection of military songs from that time.  The book inconspicuously divides the songs by race; the first group of songs do not necessarily have any racial

[24] Ibid 409. Eileen Southern also discusses how African American soldiers would prefer their own texts to "white" music in *Music of Black Americans*, 210.
[25] Although Southern raises the possibility that this tradition may have existed in the American Revolution, "Just as they had satirized their masters, mistresses, and fellow slaves in their songs back home, so much they have extemporized songs about their white officers and soldiers, their new mode of life, their army adventures, and the civilians they encountered. But no one bothered to write down the music of the black soldier, and so it is lost." Ibid, *Music of Black Americans* 66.

connotations; however, the last group clearly are indicative of “negro” origins (this text also features soldiers in black face, see below). Much of the African American music in this book seem to be original compositions; however, the song “Tell me Now” is a product of “their [African American] natural ingenuity” on reinterpreting a popular war tune, “Mad’moiselle from Armentieres:”[26]

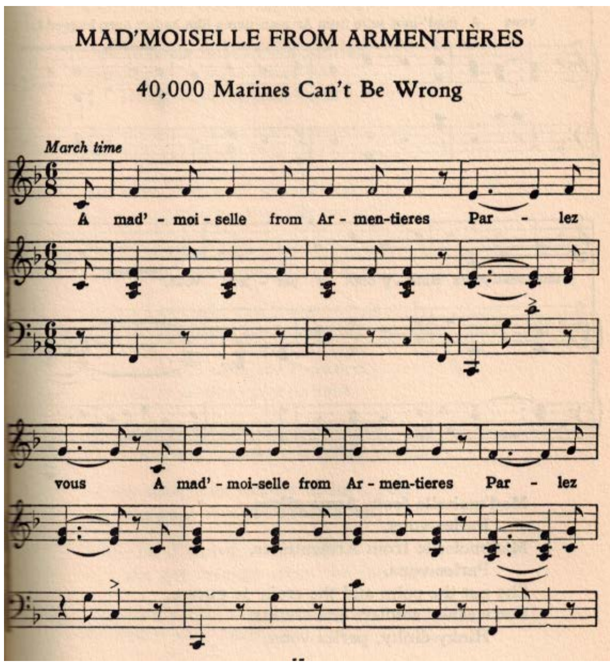
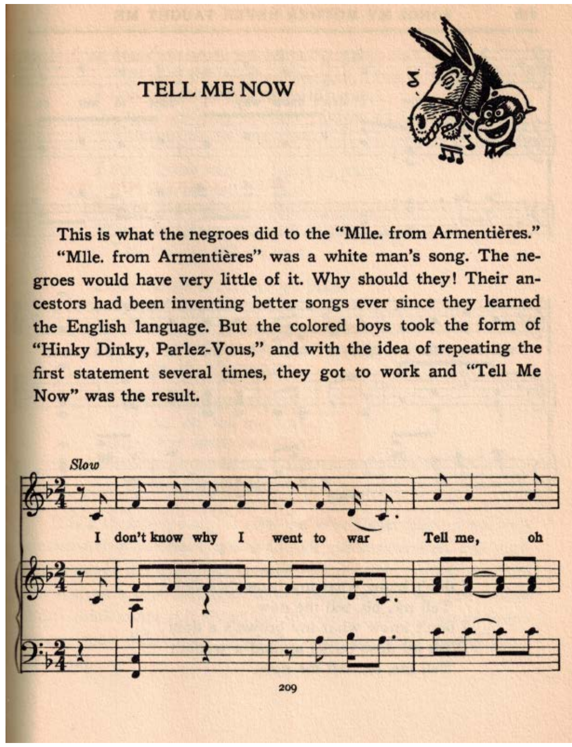



**Figure 2.1: “**Mad’moiselle from Armentieres”
*Songs my Mother Never Taught Me*, 15.

[26] John Niles, *Songs My Mother Never Taught Me* (New York: The Macaulay Company, 1929) 15.


TELL ME NOW

This is what the negroes did to the "Mlle. from Armentières." "Mlle. from Armentières" was a white man's song. The negroes would have very little of it. Why should they! Their ancestors had been inventing better songs ever since they learned the English language. But the colored boys took the form of "Hinky Dinky, Parlez-Vous," and with the idea of repeating the first statement several times, they got to work and "Tell Me Now" was the result.



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**Figure 2.2: "**Tell Me Now"
*Songs my Mother Never Taught Me*, 209.

*I don't know why I totes dis gun*
*Tell me, oh, tell me now.*
*I don't know why I totes dis gun,*
*'Cause I ain't got nothin' 'gainst de hun,*
*Tell me, oh, tell me now.*

*I don't know why we feeds so pore*
*Tell me, oh, tell me now.*
*I don't know why we feeds so pore*
*When de officer men eats so awful much more,*
*Tell me, oh, tell me now.*[27]

[27] Ibid., 209. This work is unique in that it mostly focuses on military folk songs, rather than popular music and claims to be comprehensive. While most of them seem to be original African American military songs, "Tell Me Now" is explicitly shown to be a "negro" deviation. See Melber B. Cary, "Mademoiselle from Armentieres," *The Journal of American Folklore* 47, no. 186 (Oct.-Dec., 1934) 369-376 for all the known variations of this song. Although it does mention the verse, "I don't know why I totes dis gun," she does not give credit to black soldiers. In fact, black soldiers are not discussed in the article at all, which is surprising given that she talks about how other nations reinterpreted the piece. There is a discrepancy between the Songs My Mother Never Taught Me and this journal article. It's possible that particular verse was popular throughout the Allied Expeditionary Force and there would be no reason to credit black soldiers in Cary's article. However, the John Niles seems quite convinced.

African American reinterpretations of these immensely popular tunes are indicative of a wide-spread and vibrant music tradition, one much grander than can be demonstrated with present sources. If we can assume that African American reinterpretation was systemic in the military, then there may be some doubt about the supposedly "sudden" emergence of the first military cadence, the "Duckworth Chant."

## The Story of the Duckworth Chant

Willie Duckworth was a private stationed at Ft. Slocum, NY at the Provisional Training Center during WWII. He was under the command of Col. Bernard Lentz, who coincidentally was the inventor of the most modern marching drill procedures.[28] The conventional history of the Duckworth cadence holds that while training at Ft. Slocum, Private Duckworth was "chanting," which inspired a company of fatigued men during a ruck march. When Colonel Lentz caught wind of the story, he immediately ordered recordings of Duckworth's chant and sent them off to soldiers worldwide under the auspices of the master of drill and ceremonies. The following passage is taken from the 1950 edition of *The Cadence System of Close Order Drill and Exhibition Drills*, and describes this legendary birth of the military cadence:

> The Story of the Duckworth Chant
>
> On a cold spring evening in May 1944 as the Provisional Training Center was returning from a long tedious march through swamps and rough country, a chant broke the stillness of the night. Upon investigation, it was found that a Negro soldier by the name of Willie Duckworth, on detached

[28] Lt. Col. Bernard Lentz was synonymous with closer order drill. In fact, the official regulation has his name as the author and often refers to the "Lentz System." See Bernard Lentz, *The Cadence System of Close Order Drill and Exhibition Drill* (Harrisburg, PA: The Military Service Publishing Co., 1919). The book was updated in 1950 to discuss the story of Willie Duckworth's chant and was officially incorporated into the military system. However, the most up to date military regulations no longer discuss Willie Duckworth at all, despite how ubiquitous his chants are.

service with the Provisional Training Center Fort Slocum, was chanting to build up the spirits of his weary comrades.

It was not long before the infectious rhythm was spreading through the ranks. Foot weary soldiers started to pick up their step in cadence with a growing chorus of hearty male voices. Instead of a downtrodden, fatigued company, here marched 200 soldiers with heads up, a spring to their step, and happy smiles on their faces. This transformation occurred with the beginning of the "Duckworth Chant."

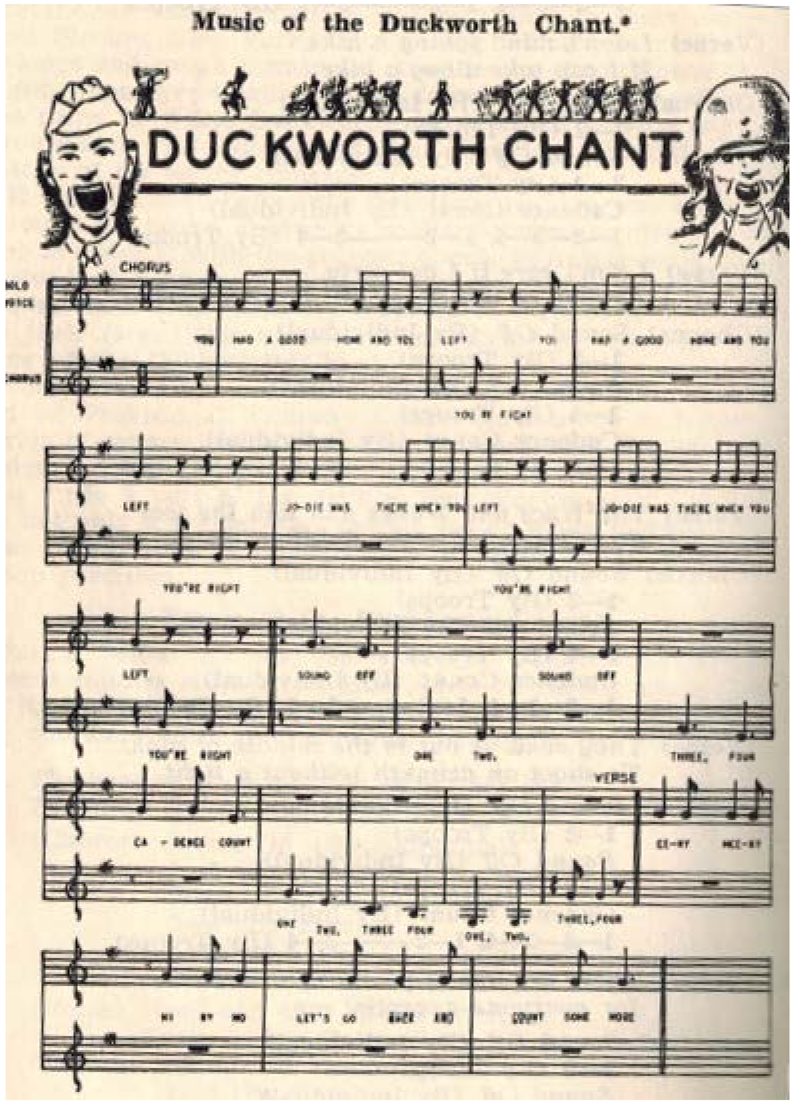
Upon returning to Fort Slocum, Private Duckworth, with the aid of the Provisional Training Center instructors, composed a series of verses and choruses to be used with the marching cadence. Since that eventful evening, the Duckworth chant has been made a part of the drill at Fort Slocum, as it has proved to be not only a tremendous morale factor while marching, but also coordinated a movement of close order drill with troop precision.


**Figure 2.3:** "Duckworth's Chant"
*The Cadence System of Close Order Drill and Exhibition Drills,* 72.

In the same publication, Colonel Lentz printed an excerpt from his correspondence with his son, Lt. Col Bernard Lentz, Commander of the third battalion, 399th Infantry, stationed in Wurttemberg, Germany which reads:

> "The Duckworth Chant (Fort Slocum edition) now resounds in the Third Battalion, 399th Infantry. The Companies are all pretty good at it by now. You should see the Dutchmen stick their eyes out when we go marching by with that number. The other day one of the companies was taking a march and they started to chant. About five minutes after they marched out, they had more kids (potential Jerry burp-gunners) following them up

> than the Pied Piper ever had; about 500 from three years up. The hike was eight miles long and most of the Heinie brats made it, so enchanted were they by the doughboys and their chant. We have mastered your sequence about change step twice, to the rear march and forth and it is a very rhythmic number."[29]

Private Duckworth's chant was not just popular with military units, it was a national sensation. In 1949, the recording used throughout the armed forces appeared in the film *Battleground*, which was an enormously popular and profitable film. It was also recorded in a big band arrangement by Vaughn Monroe in 1951. That recording was used in the 1951 film *Sound Off* starring Mickey Rooney, which takes its name from the chant.[30] In the 1950's, *The New York Times* wrote several articles about Duckworth's fame[31]. His song could be heard on "radio and television, college football bands, jukeboxes throughout the land" and "Squads of marching youngsters shout or bark it in the streets." He was also honored with the Washington Carver Award for composition.[32] This was also the time when Colonel Lentz published the book that included the "Duckworth Chant." In his special acknowledgment, he thanks the Marine Drill Platoon and the Air Force Drum and Bugle Corps. Albeit a passing mention, this probably highlights the introduction of marching cadences to the other branches, which may have been the seed that spread marching cadences to their current ubiquity in military life.

There is no question that the military owes a great debt to Private Duckworth and Colonel Lentz. However, the literature seems to take the Duckworth story as the immutable beginning of military chant. For example, in Shafer Johnson's work, she says

---

[29] Ibid, ii.
[30] V-Discs: A History and Discography (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 287-288. New York Times John Stevens
[31] "Special to the New York Times, *Composer to be Honored*: Negro who wrote "Sound Off" will get Carver award," *New York Times*, Dec. 29, 1951.
[32] John Stevens, "Tired G.I.'s Chant Becomes Song Hit," *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 1951.

it is a “miraculous” happening. Also, folklorist Kenneth Lineberry merely states that the Duckworth chant is the “birth” of the modern military chant. Some doubt the story outright—Jennifer Ladkani suggests it would have been culturally unacceptable for a black soldier to sing in a military formation during that time.

While the story of the chant is a convenient marker for historians, it is always repeated without the historical context of the previously described African American tradition. Recognizing that African Americans often changed and satirized military songs provides clarity and cultural context to Duckworth’s chant. It may also suggest that he may not have necessarily been the first soldier to sing chant in the military, but simply the one fortunate enough to be heard by a senior officer.

# CHAPTER 3

# PERFORMANCE

What makes up for cadences' lack of musical and melodic material is their rich variety of texts. Themes range from coping with inevitable death, glorification of airborne rangers, complaining about superior NCO's and commissioned officers (and occasionally privates), the enemy, alcohol, coming home, homosexuality, physical training, other military branches, infantry life, and the occasional erotica.

The most famous character referred to in cadences is "jody," who also provides the inspiration for cadences' nickname, "jody calls."[33] Jody is a stock character who represents all that soldiers dread when they are away from home, either on deployment or at basic training. Jody often is sleeping with your girl, stealing your car, and in general is enjoying all the benefits of civilian life at the soldier's expense. Here are some examples:

Leader: Your baby was lonely, as lonely as can be
Group: 'til Jody provided the company
Leader: Ain't it great to have a pal
Group: Who works so hard to keep up morale?

Sound off! / *1,2*
Sound off! / *3,4*
Cadence count! / *1,2,3,4,1,2...3,4!*

Leader: You ain't got nothin' to worry about
Group: He'll keep her happy until I get out
Leader: An' you won't get home til the end of the war
Group: In nineteen hundred and seventy four

[33] See David Mauer, "Jody's Chinese Relations," *American Speech* 57, no. 4 (1982): 306-306.This journal article explains the supposed history of the term "Jody." The article points the origin to similar Chinese trope character who constantly gets his girl stolen in the early part of the 20th century.

Sound off! / *1,2*
Sound off! / *3,4*
Cadence count! / *1,2,3,4,1,2...3,4!*

Calling cadence is only a small part of military drill and ceremony. It is common that military formations may give morning announcements, receive accountability of personnel, conduct an inspection, or give marching orders. Whatever the task, a military unit must adhere to a set of ritualized movements governed by regulations that dictate drill and ceremony. One particular drill—accountability formation—sheds light on the context of how the aesthetic of a given military cadence formulates.[34]

Accountability formation is a military event where non-commissioned officers receive formal reports of personnel present. Accountability is a necessary precursor to military marching, both as a practical matter (ensuring all soldiers are present), but also as a way of establishing command and control of a unit. The regimented nature of the first formation of the day functions as an aesthetic preempt to marching chants.

Any command issued prior to military chanting is a precursor both functionally and aesthetically. This ritual sets the stage and establishes control of the marching group and sets a strict atmosphere for the performance. An important difference between this command and the actual marching cadences is that it is in free time. This is in direct contrast to the metered performance of cadence.

[34] Here is a good place to discuss the relationship between non-commissioned and commissioned officers. Almost always, non-commissioned officers (NCOS) are typically the leaders of military cadence. In basic training, drill instructors (who are always NCOS) will always call cadence. However, they may give the opportunity to privates who demonstrate the maturity and skill to do so. In regular army units, running cadences would typically be called by NCOS as well. Drill and Ceremony is not in the main purview of commanders or other officers in a unit; however, they may be offered the opportunity to call. Unit and command dynamics play a large role in who is afforded the honor of leading a unit in cadence.

The process of receiving accountability involves many movements and calls. Although this is not a metered musical performance like cadence, there is a clear relationship. The pitches used to call cadence and to call soldiers into accountability are inextricably linked. In fact, they are almost one and the same. There is only a slight difference of the melodic range from a military cadence from a formation order; the former having a few more pitches. The technique used throughout the various military drills is the "command voice": a vocal technique deployed by leaders to dictate control of a military unit.

The following example illustrates the "command voice" used during a physical training formation:

> Caller: The next exercise will be, the push-up!
> Group: The push-up!
> Caller: Starting Position, move.
> Group: (moves into position)
> Caller: *In Cadence!*
> Group: *In Cadence!*
> Caller: Exercise!

The command, "in cadence" is musically realized. The syllables "In" and "dence" are on the same pitch where "ca" is a minor third lower than the other syllables. This example demonstrates that there seems to be a blurred line between music performance and military directives.

The music in cadence is directly reflective of the physical act of marching. Soldiers are expected to make perfectly executed and sharp movements while on the march. The callers of cadence embody these perfect, sharp movements in the musical material they perform. Cadences tend to be heavily metered and accented, with no perceptible rubato. They also tend to be very intense. They adjectives used to describe the way cadences sound is consistent with the method of how soldiers march.

The specifics of the vocal technique are described in the *Army Field Manual 3.21 Drill and Ceremonies*:

***3-6. VOICE CONTROL***

*The loudness of a command is adjusted to the number of Soldiers in the unit. Normally, the commander is to the front and center of the unit and speaks facing the unit so that his voice reaches everyone.*

*a. The voice must have carrying power, but excessive exertion is unnecessary and harmful. A typical result of trying too hard is the almost unconscious tightening of the neck muscles to force sound out. This produces strain, hoarseness, sore throat, and worst of all, indistinct and jumbled sounds instead of clear commands. Ease is achieved through good posture, proper breathing, correct adjustment of throat and mouth muscles, and confidence.*

*b. The best posture for giving commands is the position of Attention. Soldiers in formation notice the posture of their leader. If his posture is unmilitary (relaxed, slouched, stiff, or uneasy), the subordinates will imitate it.*

*c. The most important muscle used in breathing is the diaphragm—the large muscle that separates the chest cavity from the abdominal cavity. The diaphragm automatically controls normal breathing and is used to control the breath in giving commands.*

*d. The throat, mouth, and nose act as amplifiers and help to give fullness (resonance) and projection to the voice.*

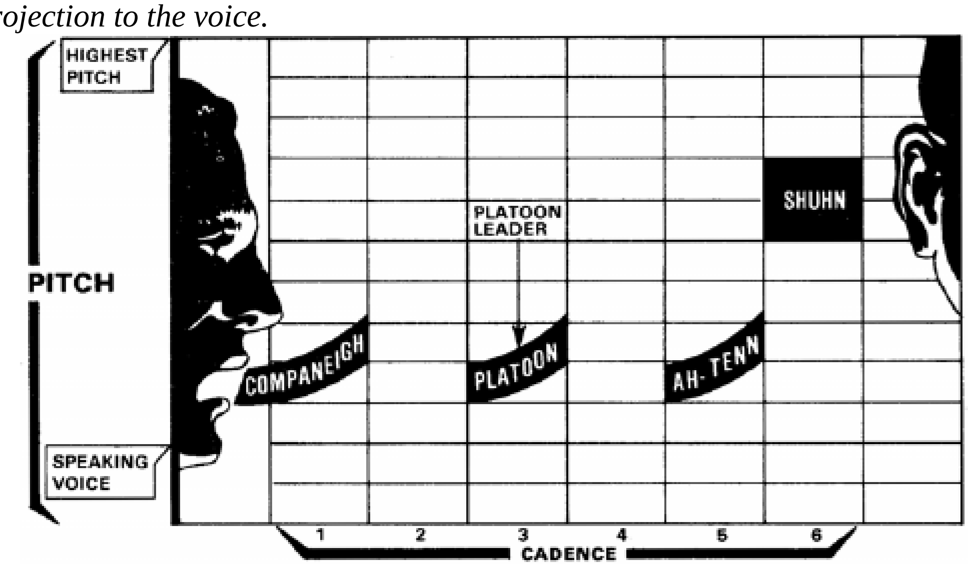



**Figure 2.4: "The Command Voice" Army Regulation 22.5**

The elevated pitch described in this diagram is almost exactly similar to the actual melodic realization of cadences. The timbre of the calls used during accountability formation, inspections, or any other military drill are incredibly similar to marching cadences. This further illustrates the blurred lines between military orders and the way outsiders might perceive them as a musical performance.

Almost universally—and much like African spirituals—cadences are based on the minor pentatonic scale. More often than not, only 3 or possibly 4 notes are used in any given cadence. Semitones are incredibly rare and are mostly reserved to highly creative callers of cadences.

## Music Parameters

### Tempo

Modern soldiers march at about 120 BPM and run at a pace of 180 BPM. The speed of marching has increased significantly over the centuries. Historian point to Handel's marches as a marker for how fast soldiers marched on the parade field, which is around 70 BPM.[35] Of course, military tactics has largely been a driver of marching speed. The modern US Military only marches four-abreast and only for training or ceremonial purposes. Modern marching does not serve the critical battlefield function as it once did in previous conflicts.

[35] Warren Allen, *Our Marching Civilization: an Introduction to the study of Music and Society, (*Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2010) 10.

**Dynamics**

Motivation is the cornerstone of all military marching cadences. As a result, the general attitude of soldiers and leaders is “volume is power.” The louder and more together a group sounds, the greater their sense of discipline and teamwork. These attributes are also associated with the caller of cadence. Because of the leadership position of the cadence caller, he or she is expected to be the embodiment of a “squared-away” soldier who is motivated, loud, and disciplined. If that soldier fails, they are subjected to ridicule and possible reprimand.

Although soldiers are expected to be as loud as possible, there is some sense of dynamic contrast. Some cadences call for one particular sub-section of soldiers (typically a platoon) to identify themselves to the group and the surrounding area during a cadence (usually to other military companies). This display of bravado is made more dramatic by the non-identified soldiers chanting more quietly in order for the identified platoon to exhibit pride and be heard. This is sign of respect by soldiers within the marching group, as they will also get their chance to identify themselves. These chants might be about the platoon’s supremacy over other platoons within the company or any others within shouting distance.

During an improvised running chant, a cadence caller may also change the dynamics. There are times when the cadence caller may chant quietly with the assumption that the running group will follow suit. This is usually followed with a dramatic crescendo into a well-known cadence. This type of performance is rare, which is probably due to the unshakable doctrine of “volume is power.”

### Form

The form of military marching and running cadences is undeniably linked to their corresponding meter. Usually, but not always, marching cadences are sung in 4/4 time and running cadences are performed in 2/2 time. In other words, running marches are ordered by the command of “double-time”, quite literally twice as fast as the order of “quick time”, or regular marching speed.

During marching cadence performance, the caller often will sing a full bar before the group calls their response. The relatively slow speed of marching cadence is much more conducive to longer melodic lines than in running cadence. As a result, marching cadences have a tendency to be realized in a codified form, most often strophic or modified strophic. This is a key similarity to African American spirituals and hymnals, where the chorus and verse are sung to the same music but only the texts change during each cycle.

The cadence “Captain Jack” is a popular example of a strophic form. While there are some occasional embellishments, each refrain from the song is sung to the exact same music. Also, this piece is a prime example of how soldiers can easily improvise. I have taken the liberty of parenthesizing words that are often changed when this song is performed. For example “Knife” may be replaced with “vodka,” so instead of a “drinkin’” man,” we have a “stabbin’ man.” Each iteration of the verse is often improvised with a different object and its corresponding action verb. During basic training, which is the most likely time where this cadence would be sung, improvisation is akin to a coping mechanism to combat boredom and to inspire soldiers to keep marching.

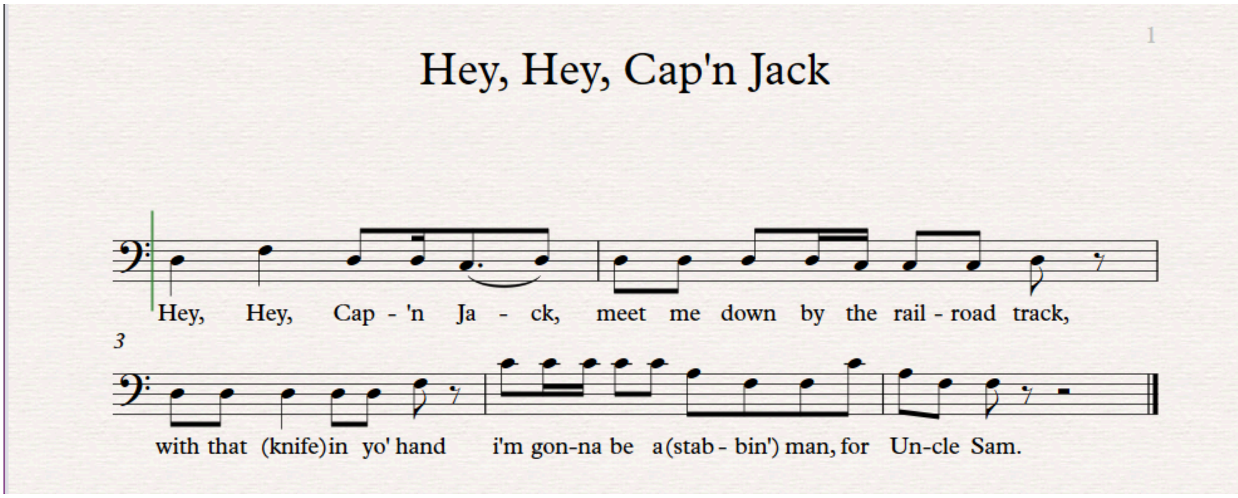



**Figure 3.1: "Hey, Hey, Cap'n Jack"**

Hey, hey Captain Jack
Meet me down by the railroad track
With that rifle in my hand
I'm gonna be a shootin' man
A shootin' man
The best I can
For Uncle Sam
Hey, hey Captain Jack
Meet me down by the railroad track
With that knife in my hand
I'm gonna be a cuttin' man
A cuttin' man
A shootin' man
The best I can
For Uncle Sam

Running cadences tend to have more variability in their form. Although running cadences may on occasion be in strophic form, improvised cadences are much more common. For experienced drill sergeants who call cadence, many of them can improvise the entire tune with no premeditated plan for navigating through the performance. In fact, callers have often used a "chorus" planned or unplanned to think of the next verse (either an improvised one or an established song).

A common trope while improvising is using short rhythmically-driven words in a random order. It seems that each utterance of these short phrases is a self-sustaining idea, as opposed to a narrative story in a marching cadences (and some running cadences). The following example demonstrates how each of these phrases could be considered their own mantras.

The intro is sung for eight beats:

> One two three four hey!
> (response),

The rest is sung every two beats and each phrase is rapidly repeated by the group:

> Sounding good, like we should, ranger, lead the way, everyday, yea, oh yea, no pain, no gain, got to do it, you can do it, dig deep, in your heart , yea, oh yea, roll call, here we go, first platoon, let me hear ya, sound off, first platoon, where ya at, let me hear ya, all right, all right, second platoon, where ya at, let me hear ya, Motivated, dedicated, here we come, down range, with the pain, get some, want some, ranger, hardcore, all right , motivated, dedicated, everyday…

The lyrics of this marching cadence could be in any order and it would be a coherent running song. Because each verse must fit within two measures, the rhythm changes drastically depending on how many words the caller wants to sing. This gives the performance a perpetual rhythmic drive, which is clearly more important than the melodic profile.

Not all running cadences are without form; some cadences have the same call and response timing as that of marching cadences. Here is one of the most well-known running cadences; this song is in strophic form, every verse is to the exact same music. Often times, the common motives that were explored in the previous improvised cadence would be added to the end to fill time or segue into another song:

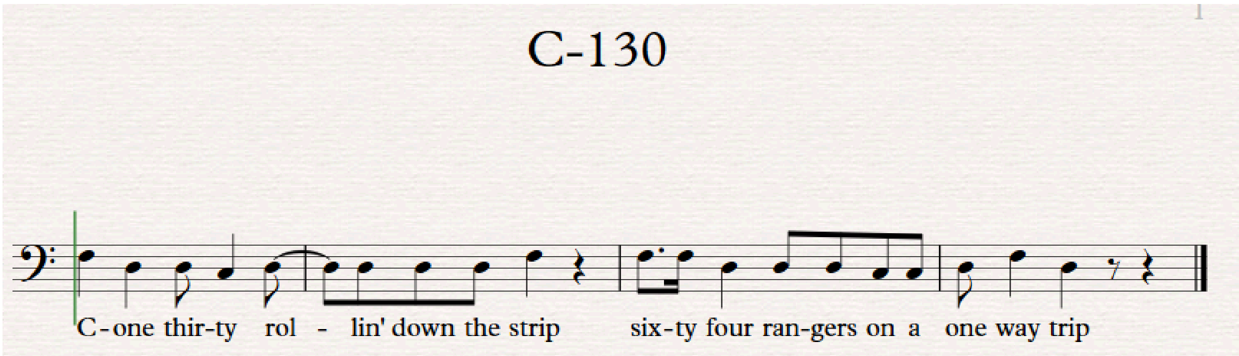



**Figure: 3.2: "C-130"**

C-130 rollin' down the strip
64 Rangers on a one-way trip
Mission Top Secret, destination unknown
They don't even know if they're ever coming home

When my plane gets up so high
Paratroopers take to the skies
Stand up, hook up, shuffle to the door
My knees got weak and I hit the floor

Jumpmaster picked me up with ease
Tossed my knees into the breeze
Count one-thousand, two-thousand, three-thousand, four
My main opened with a mighty roar

But if my main don't open wide
I got a reserve by my side
But if that one should fail me too
Look out below I'm a-comin' through

If I die on the old drop zone
Box me up and ship me home

Pin my wings upon my chest
And then bury me in the leaning rest

The song, “Livin’ my life as an Airborne Ranger is an example of verse-chorus form. This is unique among running cadences where there is different music for the verse and chorus.

When I get to Heaven,
Saint Peter's gonna say
"How'd you earn your livin' (boy)?
How'd you earn your pay?"
And I'll reply with a little bit of anger

"Made my livin' as an Airborne Ranger."
Airborne Ranger.
Ranger Danger.
Airborne Ranger.
Black beret danger.
We love to double time.
We do it all the time.
When I get to Heaven,
Saint Peter's gonna say
"How'd you earn your livin'?
How'd you earn your pay?"
And I'll reply with a whole lot of anger

"Made my livin' blood, guts, and danger."
Blood, guts, danger.
Ranger danger.
Blood, guts, and danger.
Black beret danger.
We love to double time.
We do it all the time.

In a world where toughness is revered and internal fortitude is a virtue, there is a paradoxical quality to military cadence. Cadences give soldiers the opportunity to openly express their grief and sorrow. Naturally, questioning authority in the military is strictly forbidden. However, cadence calling is a fully sanctioned and required military activity that actively condones this behavior. How does the military account for this?

It seems that the military understands that soldiers need to be able to vent their frustration. Because of this, military leaders at least want some access of control over this venting process and use it to their advantage. Soldiers are given the opportunity to transcend the harsh realities of military life, while the army uses cadence as an process of instilling discipline and thought control.

# CHAPTER 4

## MASCULINITY AND OTHERNESS

There can be no doubt that military marching cadence is not just a unique and powerful music form, but that it even has implications for our collective national defense. These songs are used as a vital part of the training of service members and have been for decades. Additionally, these songs often “stick” with soldiers for the rest of their lives. It is not uncommon to hear warriors of older generations talk about them incessantly.

Sex and warfare are intermixed in these songs. This is no doubt consistent with the hyper masculinity of military culture. Although there has been a shift in the military focusing on humanitarian aid and nation building, in reality, the military is still an organization that is primarily focused on killing and taking ground in order to win its nation’s wars. The violence required of a successful military is often sexualized and displaced towards women and particularly in military cadences.

For example, folklorist Sussan Trka highlights how systemic misogynist violence had become in the military in her discussion of the movie *Full Metal Jacket*, where the Drill instructor makes the platoon sing “This is my rifle/this is my gun/this for fighting/this is for fun.”  (Is important to note that the actor who played R. Lee Ermey was an actual Vietnam-era drill instructor who utilized actual lines from his old job.) Her sentiment can be summed up in this quote:

> This association between combat, killing, and sex is vividly demonstrated in the 1989 film Casualties of War. Based on a true story, the film depicts how a group of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam capture a Vietnamese woman, chant the rhyme "This is my rifle" to

her, and then proceed to gang rape and murder her. Further evidence of the connection between rape, murder, and warfare can be found in the expression "double veteran," which became "a common slang phrase among American soldiers" in Vietnam for a man who had sex with a woman and then killed her.[36]

The following examples demonstrate how discriminatory cadences can be, in outlining the “correct” performance of masculinity encoded in military culture:

Who's that man in the red beret
Jumpins' how he earns his pay
OH that's just the life for me
Airborne Infantry
Who's that man in the tan beret
Fighting's how he earns his pay
OH that's just the life for me
Ranger Infantry
Who's that man in the green beret
Killing's how he earns his pay
OH that just the life for me
Special Forces Infantry
Who's that man in the pink beret
I don't know but I thinks he's gay
OH that's NOT the life for me
HOMOSEXUALITY

Up jumped the Marine from the coconut grove
He's a bad motherfucker you can tell by his clothes
Backpack, jogging suit, high and tight
everything you need to get a girl in Oceanside
Took a trip down to Miramar in the spring
After a couple of beers, he went looking for a fling
He found a hundred Army bitches lined against the wall
He said "I betcha two dollars, I could fuck 'em all"
Wellll, he fucked ninety-eight and then his balls turned blue
So he backed off, he jacked off, he fucked the other two
One day he died and he went to Hell
So he fucked the devil's daughter and his wife as well
A thousand screamin' demons climbing up the walls
Screaming "Good God, help us 'fore he fucks us all!"
The moral of the story, if you can't see
Don't you ever fuck with, a US Marine

[36] Susanna Trnka. "Living a Life of Sex and Danger: Women, Warfare, and Sex in Military Folk Rhymes," *Western Folklore 54,* no. 3 (1995): 292.

The separation of homosexuality in direct contrast of the ideal warrior in this song is telling. Airborne, Rangers, and Special forces are all considered to be the elite of the US Army. They are all regularly celebrated for their storied histories and how they embody the warrior ethos. Although it is not directly stated in the song, homosexuality is a scapegoat term for those who do not strive to be in tandem with the hypermasculine culture. This sentiment is consistent with language regularly used in the military; where homophobic terms are used against those who violate military decorum.

The second example associates being a "tough marine" with violence against women. Consider the context of these two songs. Recalling that cadences are meant to glorify and instill military values i.e. "He's a bad motherfucker" or Killing' [is] how he earns his pay." Along the same lines, they explicitly otherize "deviant" identities. Although these songs may be sung in jest, how often do young impressionable soldiers confuse them with doctrine? Consider the story of Private Calvin Glover:

> On July 3, 1999, Private Calvin Glover challenged Private First Class Barry Winchell to a fistfight in front of their barracks at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Glover lost, and two days later…he took his revenge after ceaseless taunting and about having has "his ass kicked by a faggot." Glover borrowed a baseball bat… and beat Winchell to death.
> Proponents of gays in the military point to a lack of leadership at Fort Campbell…. They gathered evidence of widespread antigay harassment at the base, including senior leader's failure to discipline numerous reported instances of homophobic abuse…Even after Winchell was murdered, soldiers at Fort Campbell continued sing the following cadence during group runs: "Faggot, faggot, down the street. Shot him, shot him, till he retreats."[37]

[37] Aaron Belkin and Geoffrey Lateman, *Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Debating the Gay Ban in the Military* (Boulder, CO: Lynee Rienner Publishers) 1.

Military marching cadences raise important questions of how military culture is instilled into new soldiers. There is a precarious balancing act between teaching recruits how to conquer any mission and be a “tough warrior”, while trying to maintain civility and respect. The prevalence of these songs has no place in the modern military. Only a proactive condemnation by our military leaders can create a more sustainable and respectful military culture.

## For Further Study

In order for scholars to have a better grasp of the cultural impact of military marching cadences, it would be necessary to gather and record as many cadences as possible. The military is currently going through an important transition period that will likely significantly impact the way soldiers are chanting cadences. There have been dramatic shifts in policy over the last few years that have included allowing women into combat roles and the repeal of Don't Ask , Don't Tell.

Congress has put significant pressure on the military to drastically increase their scrutiny of sexual assault and hostile work environments. Sexual harassment prevention and awareness is a ubiquitous part of military training now. Clearly, military culture is rapidly changing and most assuredly the songs the military sings will change as well. Only understanding the full scope of problematic military marching cadences of the past can lead to a better policy of combating hostile culture for the future.

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