



## INFORMATION PAPER

SUBJECT: History of the Jody Call and Military Cadences

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### **The History of Military Cadences**

The beginnings of today's complex, creative, rhythmic military cadences (also known as cadence calls, jody calls, or jodies) can be traced back to the Army's earliest days. It was in the cold cradle of Valley Forge that Baron Friedrich von Steuben, General George Washington's Prussian inspector general and drillmaster, first imparted upon the infant Army the harsh lessons of Continental European military discipline.

Foremost among Steuben's priorities was the implementation of formal Prussian drill and parade techniques, including the strict close-order drill formations employed by the professional armies of the age. In order to coordinate these complex drills, the Army made use of sergeants and drummers to maintain cohesion and give soldiers instruction.

Although drills and the techniques by which they were taught changed continuously in the decades after the Revolution, the use of both oral and percussive cadences persisted until 1917. The reforming impulse which struck the Army upon its entrance into the Great War eventually eliminated the standard use of the fife and drum across the Army (although specialized units like the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment carry on this tradition). Until the waning days of World War II, close-order coordination was maintained through spoken counting typically led by training sergeants or other NCO's.

### **The Duckworth Chant**

In 1944, Private Willie Lee Duckworth, a young Black Georgian stationed at Fort Slocum, New York, introduced an innovation in military cadences which remains a core piece of the Army's traditions to this day: the jody call.

It was on a thirteen-mile road march back to base from a 24-hour bivouac that Pvt. Duckworth introduced the Army's first jody call, leading his all-Black unit in the iconic call and response:

*"Sound-off; 1 - 2; Sound-off; 3 - 4; Cadence count; 1 - 2 - 3 - 4; 1 - 2 — 3 - 4."*

According to Ft. Slocum's commander, Colonel Bernard Lentz, the rejuvenating effect of the "Duckworth Chant" (also known as "Sound Off") was immediately apparent:

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

[From "The Cadence System of Teaching Close Order Drill and Exhibition Drills" (p. 70)]

Col. Lentz tasked Pvt. Duckworth with formalizing the lyrics to his creation; the finalized lyrics, as copyrighted and disseminated by Pvt. Duckworth and Col. Lentz, also include the first official mention of the eponymous "Jody:"

*"I had a good home, but I left (you're right)  
Jody was there, when I left (you're right)*

*I left gal away out west  
I thought this army life was best  
Now she's someone else's wife  
And I'll be marchin' the rest of my life"*

The ubiquitous presence of Jody, a fictional character who steals soldiers' sweethearts and represents the sacrifices made by soldiers in their personal lives, eventually lent the new breed of cadence calls its name.

### **The Origin, Benefits, and Spread of the Jody Call**

Pvt. Duckworth's innovation was a unique synthesis of the contemporary Army's sterile counting cadences and Black cultural innovations, particularly blues-influenced call-and-responses popular among Black manual laborers of the day. The figure of Jody, for instance, originated in Black working cadences sung in the decades preceding the Second World War. "Joe the Grinder," as he was originally known (eventually "Jody Grinder" and finally "Jody"), was a catch-all representation of a n'er-do-well who took advantage of the heroic, long-suffering everyman's wife while he spent long hours laboring away from home.

Lyrics about Jody and the travails of the workingman's life, set to the blues rhythms popular amongst the Black community of the day, were often sung wherever large groups of Black men conducted repetitive manual labor. They served much the same purpose as the Army's jody calls, ensuring coordination and bolstering both psychological and physical strength.

Modern jodies improve soldiers' teamwork, camaraderie, and physical performance. Typically sung at either marching (120 beats per minute) or running (180 beats per minute) speed, cadence calls ensure that soldiers keep their head up and breathe forcefully while running or marching, improving their endurance and coordination.

In the highly racialized society of the 1940's, jodies also helped break through the wall Jim Crow had built between segregated white and Black Army units. The communal medium of the jody call, steeped in Black cultural history, allowed soldiers of all backgrounds to share in the struggles and triumphs enumerated by the Duckworth Chant/Sound Off and later iterations of the genre:

*“In my basic training camp in Missouri they had us count the rate of steps in close formation marching. We shouted out of parched throats and cursed the sergeant under our breath. Then round the corner came the Negro battalion, marching as one man, with somehow a hint of syncopation in its step. When the big, handsome, coloured [sic] sergeant counted the steps, every one of those hundreds of left feet hit the road on the off-beat. Every throat opened on the chorus. Big, four-part blues chords roared over our heads. For just a moment, army life and basic training seemed almost a pleasure.*

*World War II was the first time that a great number of Negroes had been accepted on something like an equal basis in the American Army. The process of expelling Jim Crow from the armed forces was not complete, but discrimination was on its way out, and you could hear it between the lines of this virile folk song of World War II. Sound Off is cynical, disillusioned, and touched with blues cadences, but it contains a note of confidence and a joyful acceptance of the nature of life and love that is new in American folk song.”*

[From “The Folksongs of North America” (p. 581-582)]

The Duckworth Chant quickly spread across the Army and throughout the services. By the end of the Second World War, it was commonplace wherever American service members could be found around the world.

The rapid spread of the Duckworth Chant and the gusto with which it was adopted soon engendered the addition of new entries into the genre, and jodies became a foundational element of life as a new Army recruit. Jodies were generally a medium for soldiers to commiserate about both the excitement of combat and the mundane hardships of Army life (including food, drink, accommodations, officers, women, and romance).

Women entered the Army in large numbers during the Second World War, contributing 150,000 service members through the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (the WAAC, later the Women's Army Corps, or WAC). Like their male counterparts, WAAC/WAC units quickly adopted the jody call as an essential part of training and military socialization, and popular cadence calls were adapted to reflect the unique circumstances of a woman's life as a soldier.

### **Changing with the Army**

Until after the War in Vietnam, jody calls were often outrageously profane, especially in their treatment of women and “enemy” civilians. This reflects the social mores of the time, the overwhelmingly male composition of the Army, and the high proportion of draftee soldiers (especially in Vietnam) hardened by cynicism about a war of which they wanted little part.

However, as times shifted and the Army became more gender-balanced, jody calls changed as well. With the integration of the WAC into the regular Army in 1978, many cadence calls were made gender-neutral, eliminating sexist or suggestive themes and allowing newly-integrated female soldiers to seamlessly continue participating in the Army's jody call traditions. The infamous Jody's unisex name served this end well, and the womanizing civilian boogeyman of the Duckworth Chant took on a complementary second role as a husband-stealer.

The Army's simultaneous shift towards an all-volunteer, career-oriented model after the Vietnam War introduced a corresponding professionalizing impulse to a force demoralized after years of war in Southeast Asia. By the mid-1980's many units had begun systematically excising the most offensive and profane lyrics from their roster of jodies. Most sexist, suggestive, or vulgar language had been removed and the calls altered to reflect the needs and values of the modern Army by the mid-1990's.

In today's Army, soldiers march and run to cadence calls far more professional and inclusive than those of their predecessors. With the full integration of Black and female soldiers into the Army, all trainees can participate equally in the Army's jody call traditions, and gain the full benefits they offer to physical training, coordination, and camaraderie-building.