CAROL BURKE

Marching to Vietnam

Marching chants induce recruits to sever ties with a civilian past and to embrace, however reluctantly, a martial future. In wartime, these recruits adopt the persona of frontline soldiers, though they may never see combat; in peacetime, they chant of their predecessors. While some Vietnam cadence calls reflect conventional attitudes about training and combat, others draw the grotesque picture of the enemy as helpless civilian child.

DRILL has played an important part in military training since the 17th century, when Dutch forces demonstrated the power of rigorous drill to transform the rank and file into a cohesive unit, both more efficient in battle and obedient in the garrison (McNeill 1982:126). Until the mid-19th century and the invention of the breech-loaded rifle (McNeill 1982:254), the carefully choreographed movements of drill (walking in step, loading, and firing) were rehearsal for the greater drama of the battlefield. But today's drill, considered essential to any training program, has no direct parallel to movements in war. A vestige of a time when men fought standing up, not on their stomachs and certainly not behind technologically complex control panels, drill today serves a symbolic function: it erases individuality and inscribes a corporate identity—the movements of individuals indistinguishable from the whole.

Cadence calls, or marching chants, accompany drill in all branches of today's military. Practical in their purpose, "cadences" build morale, ensure group cohesion, and ease strain by diverting attention from monotonous and often strenuous labor or training. As military tradition, these verses pass from company to company, division to division, service to service, even war to war, carrying with them certain attitudes toward the military life one has adopted and the civilian life one has left behind. Although some cadences celebrate the bravado of combat, most complain of the daily discomforts suffered away from home ("Ain't no use in going to chow./ They never feed you anyhow.").

Through cadences, humor lightens the tedium and pain of training, providing opportunities for even the lowliest to mock a superior and for the group to express its disdain for a rival. Sometimes wit and originality are applied to amend the most familiar cadences and express a group's sentiments, thus particularizing a form of verse sung over and over by thousands experiencing the

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rigors of training. It is the additions to standard cadences, their variants, that are interesting to the scholar of oral lore. Even within the rigid practice of discipline there is room for innovation.

Typically, in the performance of cadences the platoon echoes each line or stanza of the caller, imitating inflection and tone. In the Vietnam and post-Vietnam cadences that follow I have omitted the echo of each line. My analysis is restricted here to the lyrics of calls; I do not consider their formal qualities of song and chant. Some quotations are only fragments of longer cadences; others are two calls fused. Some are marching cadences performed at a marching rhythm of 120 steps per minute; others are running cadences with a rhythm of 180 steps per minute. I collected most of these calls from midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy, who since Vietnam have chanted the cadence calls brought most often to the Academy from prior-enlisted marines and sailors. In Basic Training, DI's (drill instructors) preserve these verses; at the service academies, upperclassmen teach cadences to freshmen who, in turn, pass them on to subsequent classes. Calls at the service academies are updated by the influx of new verses from "prior-enlisteds." Because these calls were first discouraged three years ago at the Academy and then officially banned a year later, most individual informants wished to remain anonymous.[1] In addition, I have collected cadence calls from active-duty enlisted marines and sailors, as well as from students attending Virginia Military Institute and The Citadel, where these calls continue uncensored.

Although cadences form a vital part of military folklore, they have received little attention by folklorists. Agnes Underwood's discussion of "G.I. Joe" cadences (1947), George Carey's collection of airborne cadences (1965), and Bruce Jackson's study of "the Jody call" (1967) are chief among this scant work. The publication of *Cadences: The Jody Call Book I* in 1983 and *The Jody Call Book II* in 1986 by Sandee Shaffer Johnson represented the first efforts to document cadences from all branches of the military, particularly from the Army and the Marine Corps. Unfortunately, these two volumes are of little use to scholars, for they omit the most offensive, though nevertheless popular, verses of contemporary cadence calls.[2] Since Johnson's collections are heavily bowdlerized, I have quoted from them only when a selection is more detailed than the version I have collected.

Offensiveness drives cadences; whether in the form of insult to a superior ("The cabin boy, the cabin boy/ That naughty little nipper/ He lined his ass with shards of glass/ And circumcised the skipper"),[3] whether as the ghoulish celebration of the slaughter of innocents ("See the family by the stream; watch the parents run and scream./ Viet Cong will never learn; push a button and watch 'em burn.") or the playful sexist objectification of women:

I wish all the girls were bricks in a pile,
And I was a mason; I'd lay 'em all in style.

I wish all the girls were pies on a shelf
And I was a baker; I'd eat 'em all myself.[4]

Through these, the group asserts itself as the tough "bad boy" equally ready to slaughter and to screw. For the trainee, cadences transform the horrifying prospect of combat into a game, something to sing about.

Typically, cadence calls oppose the longing for loved ones with the celebration of a new life as a member of the group:

Suzie said to me one day long ago
"Honey, please don't join the Corps [pronounced *co*]

All they do is fuss 'n fight
and they look kinda weird with those 'high and tights.'[5]

They got poor table manners, and they're so rude.
They got a warped sense of humor, and they're so crude."

I said, "Suzie, let me tell you what I'll do
I'll join the Corps for a year or two."

So I packed up my trash and headed for the plane
and I went to the place where they make Marines.

Quantico was the name of the place.
The first thing I saw was a drill instructor's face.

He had razor creases and a Smokey Bear
Mountain climbin' privates everywhere.

Now Suzie said, "It's me or the Corps,
I can't take this life no more."

So I looked at her with a big ole grin.
I haven't seen Suzie since I don't know when.[6]

Although the soldier leaves lovers behind, new ones come with his professional life:

Cindy, Cindy, Cindy Lou
Love my rifle more than you.

You used to be my beauty queen,
Now I love my M-16.

Used to go to the county fair,
Now I don't take you anywhere.

Send me off to Vietnam
Goin' to get me some Viet Cong.

With my knife or with my gun
Either way it's just as fun.[7]

According to cadences, the enemy, the Viet Cong, replace Cindy Lou as the object of the soldier's sexual aggression. Cadences celebrate the displacement

of sexual energy from the female left behind to the enemy waiting on the battlefield. Women are as infinitely replaceable as the enemy, and combat, say cadences, is as exhilarating as sex. Cadences devalue all nonprofessional affiliations; they mark a soldier's passage from civilian life to combat by encouraging masturbatory compensation: "I don't want no teenage queen./ I just want my M-16."

Such compensation is illustrated in Kubrick's Vietnam film, *Full Metal Jacket,* in a barracks scene in which the drill instructor leads his trainees, clad only in underwear, one hand on their rifles, the other grasping their genitals, in a truly universal marching chant, one that has crossed all service lines:

This is my rifle; this is my gun.
This is for fighting; this is for fun.

In step, the barefooted, scantily clad trainees stroke their genitals in perfect beat to the command of the uniformed drill instructor, a form of collective autoeroticism. In practice, this chant appears early in training, usually as punishment when one drops his rifle or mistakenly calls it his "gun." Such a punishment chant reinforces the new professional vocabulary, not by distinguishing penis from weapon, but, in fact, by conflating them; for the successful trainee both are bodily appendages.

The education of all military trainees substitutes guns for lovers, harsh drill sergeants for fathers, and group survival for the needs of the individual. The freshly forged identity of the young trainee distinguishes him from other military professionals and celebrates group identity:

Army and the Navy went to Vietnam
Couldn't quite handle those Viet Cong.

Marines went in and pulled them out.
Left old Charlie sittin' full of doubt.

We got some supplies and we got some gas
Went back in kickin' Charlie's ass.

Burn 'em out, Blow 'em up, Cut 'em down
Kick their asses all around.

Da Nang, Khe Sanh, Saigon, too
(Unit Name) is comin' for you.[8]

Cadences like this suspend history. Da Nang, Khe Sanh, and Saigon, the sites of old battles, are timeless exotic places the young trainee even today sings of conquering. The renaming of Saigon to Ho Chi Minh City would be impossible for more than its scansion. In many ways an unfinished war, Vietnam enjoyed no triumphant closure; its veterans very often returned either to harsh criticism or to embarrassed silence.

Whereas World War II signaled an end of war and a new beginning, the Vietnam War ended in a general weariness: its participants were more often

abandoned as victims rather than welcomed as heroes. The weariness of Vietnam is reflected in the decline of the legendary tough "gran'daddy" of cadence calls, veteran of multiple wars, who provides a personal genealogy of the marine. Rendered sedentary, his vital energy finally dissipated, the old horse marine is like so many Vietnam vets—confined to a chair:

My gran' daddy was a Horse Marine,
When he was born he was wearing green.
Ate his steaks six inches thick,
Picked his teeth with a swagger stick.
Drinkin' and fightin' and runnin' all day,
Gran' daddy knew no other way.
Lived every day of his life for the Corps,
So they sent him off to war.
Went to the Island to fight Japanese,
Caught a bullet in his deri-or
Went to a country called Vietnam,
To fight some people called Viet Cong.
Found himself in a firefight,
Came back home in a Medivac flight.
Now Gran' daddy just sits there,
Marking time in his rocking chair.
[Johnson 1986:62]

Although several career soldiers who fought in World War II and Vietnam had also served in Korea, Korea is conspicuously absent from this soldier's history. Only a few cadences performed today mention Korea. Its omission in this cadence allows the caller to construct an unbroken narrative from World War II to Vietnam. But the collapse of twenty years does not erase the distinctions between these two wars. At the same time the caller celebrates the tough soldier of old, he also reveals that soldier's present weakened state. The superhero of the first few lines who "ate his steak six inches thick" and "picked his teeth with a swagger stick" diminishes in stature by the end of the cadence. This World War II fighter, the ole Dan Tucker Horse Marine who spent his time "drinkin' and fightin' and runnin' all day" returns from Vietnam to sit out his days rocking in time, presumably, to this very cadence.

Another cadence to link these two wars celebrates the history of a single division:

Listen now and listen well,
I've got a combat story to tell.

Nineteen hundred and forty-one,
World War II had just begun.

Fighting it was mighty rough,
Nazi Germans were mighty tough.

In the States a fighting team,
They found out we were mighty mean.

June sixteenth, nineteen forty-four,
One-oh-first went to war.

From the skies of Normandy,
Rendezvous with destiny.

At the Battle of the Bulge,
Some men died, but some men told

Of bravery and the guts.
General _____who said, "Nuts!"

Nineteen hundred and sixty-five,
And Vietnam came alive.

People were dying left and right,
The one-oh-first came to fight.

With their M-16 in their hands,
One-oh-first swept the land.

They said Charlie Cong was bold and brave,
The one-oh-first put him in his grave.
[Johnson 1986:86]

Such revisionist history legitimizes the Vietnam War as one equivalent to the great war in Europe and American soldiers as the direct descendants of World War II veterans (as many of them literally were). Like their fathers before them, they trained for the glorious and the grisly. "Charlie Cong was bold and brave, [but] the one-oh-first put him in his grave." Statistics, though, tell another tale of this unit's history: 4000 men from the 101st were killed in Vietnam.[9]

While some cadences fashion an identity for the trainee, others anticipate his role in combat:

See DZ 60 feet below
Hit the ground and I'm ready to go.

From the sky in the middle of the night
Hit the deck and I'm ready to fight.

I look to my front and what do I see
But a couple of commies lookin' at me.

I stab the first one in the chest
And let my NATO buddies kill the rest.

I look to my right and what do I see
But a couple of VC shootin' at me.

I heave a grenade in the grass
And blow away their VC ass.

I look to my left and what do I see
But a Commie cannon muzzle pointed at me.

I heave some C-4 through the air.
When the dust clears that cannon ain't there.

If I die on the combat zone
Box me up and send me home.

Tell my Momma I did my best
Then bury me in the leanin' rest.

Mothers of America now don't you cry.
Marine Corps way is to do or die.

Place a K-bar in my hand
And I'll fight my way to the Promised Land![10]

The paratrooper lands ever-ready for combat: enemy in front of him, enemy to his left, enemy to his right. With knife (his "K-bar"), grenade, and plastic explosives (C-4), he conquers them all, all that is, except the unmentioned enemy to his rear, the enemy against which he cannot arm himself. The two final stanzas depicting the marine's burial in push-up position ("the leanin' rest") and subsequent resurrection serve as a coda to many cadence calls. In some, the soldier fights his way through hell, the most hostile of enemy territories, en route to "the Promised Land." Born as a marine when he falls into the drop zone ("DZ") and into combat, he ascends to heaven fighting as fiercely as he did in life. Although his body returns to his "Momma," his spirit never does, for with the song of his restoration to the land of heroes comes the backward condolence to the "Mothers of America" explaining that he, like all sons who die in combat, is simply following the "Marine Corps way."

Every branch of the service chants a cadence call addressed to mothers, a sort of letter home complaining of the painful transition to military life. While the young soldier trains, he sings of the loss of his past: of his possessions, of his leisure time, even of his lover. Designed to remake the individual, training severs ties with a civilian past. As a former head of drill instructors at Parris Island explains:

> Training was designed at Parris Island to break the umbilical cord between military and civilian life, designed to break him down to his fundamental self, take away all that he possesses and get him started out in the way that you want him to be. Issue him all new clothes, cut his hair, send his possessions home and tell him he doesn't know a damn thing, that he's the sorriest thing you've ever seen, but with my help you're going to be worthwhile again.[11]

While marching or running in formation, the young soldier laments the loss of past pleasures, a loss made permanent by the legendary "Jody," Joe the Grinder of black oral tradition (Jackson 1967:387), who fiendishly appropriates the trainee's car, his girl, sometimes even his sister:

Ain't no use in callin' home.
Jody's on your telephone.

Ain't no use in lookin' back,
Jody's got your Cadillac.

Ain't no use in going' home,
Jody's got your girl and gone.

Ain't no use in feelin' blue,
Jody's got your sister too.[12]

Echoing the drill instructor, each trainee complains of the eternally potent, devilish Jody who doubles for the soldier in his absence, filling his vacated civilian role. During Vietnam, "Charlie," the ambiguous military/civilian enemy stepped in for the insidious Jody:

Mama Mama can't ya see
what the Navy's done to me.
(first verse and chorus)

Shaved my head and broke my back.
Now Charlie drives my Cadillac.

Wo, wo, woa, wo,
Wo woa, woa, wo.

Tried to write my Susie Q
Seems Charlie's got my girlfriend too.[13]

Today, both the Charlie and the Jody versions flourish in basic training programs.

Still another version defends the identity of a soldier to the mythical "Mama" and justifies his violence as professional:

Mama, mama, can you see
What the Rangers did to me?
(first verse and chorus)

See my buddies on the ground,
Hear them bullets whizzin' round.

They gave me a knife, taught me to fight,
Sent me out in the middle of night.

Saw the sentry, brought him down,
Felt the blood come oozin 'round.

Taught me how to kill a man,
Now I've had to—and know I can.

Hear me wake in the middle of the night,
Sweatin' and shakin', rememberin' the fight.

The day may come, I hope it can,
When I won't need my knife again.

But Mama 'til that day arrives
I'll practice taking others' lives.

When you ask why that must be,
One big word will describe me.

Ranger! Mama, that's what I am—
One of a breed of fighting men.[14]

The answer to the mother's plaintive question, "How can this be?" is a single word, "Ranger," a word that legitimizes the trainee's new identity. In the end, the speaker asks his mother to accept him for what he truly is, a more essential self, "one of a breed of fighting men." How strange on the face of it that the speaker should explain his breeding to his mother! If she does not know of his breeding, who does? But of course, the line is first chanted by the caller and echoed by the platoon of sons, each attesting to the formation of a new self, one not of woman born. The mother who is addressed exists only as a word against which to define the offspring of the perfectly efficient patriarchy, the martial machine through which the exchange of blood breeds new soldiers trained to kill. But such breeding extracts personal costs in the form of flashbacks, the frightening battles one returns to alone.

In training, one is never alone, but cadences from previous wars rarely speak of war's loneliness. The exception, Vietnam cadences contain several references to the isolation of the single combat soldier. Take, for example, the following:

Vietnam, Vietnam,
late at night,
while you're sleeping
Charlie company comes acreeping.

You're sitting in your foxhole.
You think you got it made.
But there lies your buddy
with a bullet in his head.

You're sitting in your foxhole.
You're thinking about your wife.
Charlie's on the move.
He's out to take your life.

They take you up in choppers
to the battle zone.
You think they're all around you.
Then you find you're all alone.[15]

Here the bitter voice of experience speaks as one who has known the darkness, a darkness through which Charlie invisibly creeps, firing silent bullets. With-

out his buddy, without his wife, even without the "they" who take him to the battle zone, the soldier is alone with Charlie, or worse, with only himself. The deadly fear of isolation haunts this cadence.

But out of the darkness, legends are also born. One such demonic figure is Slippery Sam, a recon marine who creeps back after Charlie, driving him mad:

Up from the jungle of Vietnam
Came a Recon Marine they called Slippery Sam.
Wore a string of ears right across his chest
Just to show the Charlie he was the best.
Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty or more,
Sam kept shootin' em and addin' up the score.
Many VC died tryin' to kill this Marine,
But Slippery Sam was too damn mean.
One day, while crawlin' through the jungle trees
Sam shot a gook right in the knees.
He pulled out his K-bar before he died
And stuck it right between his eyes.
One day on a hill they called Khe Sanh
Sam decided to have some fun.
He put fifty claymores in a line
And then watched ole Charlie blow his mind.[16]

Brutality is certainly not unique to Vietnam. Each war carries its own brand of dark, twisted humor that laughs at what is too horrible to take seriously. The awful chilling irony of battlefield humor removes the speaker from the terror close at hand and imposes a momentary control that softens the shriek into uneasy laughter. In response to a *New Yorker* article by Jonathan Schell (1967), General Westmoreland, commander of all allied forces in Vietnam, rationalizes the need for "gallows humor":

Soldiers have employed gallows humor through the ages. What paratrooper, for example, singing the drinking song, "Blood on the Risers," really revels in the gory death of the man he is singing about? Gallows humor is, after all, merely a defense mechanism for men engaged in perilous and distasteful duties." [1980:377]

To explain the bitter humor of Vietnam, Westmoreland universalizes it in the illustration of the popular song, "Blood on the Risers" (sung to the tune of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic") that was popular during World War II and Korea. Relaxed and away from the horrors of combat, airborne soldiers and marines released their tensions by singing of violence that accidently befalls one of their own, the paratrooper whose chute fails to open:

He hit the ground, the sound was "splat."
The blood it spurted high.
His comrades they were heard to say,
"What a pretty way to die."

He lay there rolling 'round
in the welter of his gore.
And he ain't gonna jump no more.

There was blood upon the risers,
There were brains upon the chute.
Intestines were a-danglin'
from his paratrooper suit;
They picked him up still in his chute
And poured him from his boots.
And he ain't gonna jump no more.[17]

To laugh at the chance accident, to minimize the fear that every jumper faces, is a way of keeping that fear under control, or at least within the ordered rhythm of a patriotic hymn. "He was just a rookie trooper and he surely shook with fright," the song opens, and each stanza is followed by the chorus:

Gory, Gory, what a helluva way to die!
Gory, Gory, what a helluva way to die!
Gory, Gory, what a helluva way to die!
And he ain't gonna jump no more.

By looking at the cadences taught as part of training in all branches of the military, Westmoreland could certainly have found more appropriate examples of battlefield humor Vietnam style. To shrug off in song a real danger that confronts each paratrooper is very different from chanting of one's pleasure at inflicting pain on civilians, as in the following Vietnam cadence:

See the family beside the stream,
flyin' high and feelin' mean.
Pick one out and watch 'em scream,
Yo, Oh! Napalm, it sticks to kids.

See the hippies upon the hills
Smokin' grass and poppin' pills.
Don't they know that drugs can kill,
Yo, Oh! Napalm, it sticks to kids.

See the women beside the river,
washin' clothes and cookin' dinner.
Pick one out and watch her quiver,
Yo, Oh! Napalm, it sticks to kids.

See the baby in its mother's arms,
Ain't never done no one no harm.
Barbecue baby ain't got no charm,
Yo, Oh! Napalm, it sticks to kids.

See the orphans in the school,
Don't they know that they're all fools.

Burnin' flesh, it smells so cool.
Yo, Oh! Napalm, it sticks to kids.

See the kiddies in the street
Cryin' and lookin' for som'in to eat.
Drop trick toys that look real neat
Blow up in their face and make 'em all meat.

See the choppers come and go,
Oh they're flyin' much too low.
Rotor blades are not too slow.
Heads go flyin' to and fro.[18]

From his remote and mighty perspective, the demonic pilot delights in repeated demonstrations of his own power, or rather the power of American technology to unleash a weapon so odious as napalm. The napalm in these cadences rarely lands on enemy troops, does little to ensure victory but falls from the skies like blazing rain, searing the civilian population below. The speaker fiendishly narrates in first person one brutal scene after another: barbecued babies, burned orphans, and decapitated peasants in an almost cartoon-like litany.

If to "see" for the narrator is equivalent to "kill," then why would he shift his gaze from Vietnam to America and hippies "smokin' grass and poppin' pills"? And why pose the question, "Don't they know that drugs can kill?" The answer seems obvious: to suggest that the two forms of killing are somehow to be equated. I would venture that the intended victims of his cadence call include hippies, those civilians, roughly the same age as the trainee, who smoke dope, drop acid, and protest the very war in which this narrator cynically participates. The napalm cadence may, in fact, be read as an angry response to protesters who recited their own chants outside the White House: "Hey, hey, LBJ/ How many kids did you kill today?" This cadence transforms the protesters' image of the American slaughterer, the "baby killer," into the haunting voice of someone who has seen the slaughter and come back having enjoyed it—a protest against a protest. The warrior turned "baby killer" gleefully details stereotypical scenes of gratuitous violence as if to scandalize a critical public.

Formally interesting, each stanza of this cadence begins with the command to adopt the godly perspective of the narrator, to sit with him flying above the civilian world and "see the family," "see the hippies," "see the women," "see the baby," "see the orphans," "see the choppers." Only when the pilot descends to smell the results of his work, the "cool" smell of burning flesh, does he violate his ironic distance. And each stanza concludes with the unrhymed line, "Yo, Oh! Napalm, it sticks to kids" as if such a statement were a fact that could not be matched or balanced with a companion line in rhyme. The refrain, itself, half playful exclamation "Yo, Oh!" and half cruel fact, sticks in the mind on first hearing, shocking and dissonant. But according to many who have sung or who continue to recite this call, successive performances

empty the line of its horror, transforming the dark acknowledgment of collective cynicism and guilt into a grim advertising jingle. Napalm, the sign of American extravagance, luxuriously annihilates even the harmless. The narrator who wields such a weapon speaks not as the brave warrior of the previously quoted paratrooper cadence who defends himself against assault on all sides, but sounds, instead, like the crazed adolescent who delights in his own power, the puny guy inside the big machine. Such sadistic pleasure rings through other cadence calls sung during and after Vietnam which have no explicit Vietnam theme. Consider the following:

A little bird with a yellow bill
Landed on my window sill.
I coaxed him in with a piece of pie
And then I poked out his little eye.

A little bird with a yellow bill
Landed on my window sill.
I coaxed him in with a crust of bread
And then I crushed his little head.[19]

The giving hand is the hand of destruction in this cadence as it is in another napalm chant:

Shell the town and kill the people.
Drop the napalm in the square.
Do it on a Sunday morning
While they're on their way to prayer.

Aim your missles at the schoolhouse.
See the teacher ring the bell.
See the children's smiling faces
As their schoolhouse burns to hell.

Throw some candy to the children.
Wait till they all gather round.
Then you take your M-16 now
and mow the little fuckers down.

See the Cobras in formation.
Watch them flying way down low.
See them fly into the children,
Heads are toss-ed to and fro.[20]

The motif of the helping hand becoming the hand of destruction grasps the irony at the center of American ambivalence toward its role in Vietnam. American soldiers sent to defend South Vietnam against outside aggressors found themselves performing aggressive acts on the people and the land they were attempting, ostensibly, to defend. Vietnam lore inverts an American stereotype: the friendly GI surrounded by foreign children, an image one sees

over and over in accounts of World War II veterans as well as in the media at the time. The GI's gesture of generosity becomes the act of destruction. The discordant mixture of affection and hatred characterizes this most poignant scene, a scene legendary in the accounts of Vietnam veterans. Sergeant Jack Smith narrates one such account:

> The GIs, when they originally get in the country, they feel friendly toward the Vietnamese and they toss candy at the kids, but as they become hardened to it and kind of embittered against the war, as you drive through the ville you take cans of C-rats [combat rations] . . . and you peg 'em at the kids! . . . You try to belt them over the head. And one of the fun games was that you dropped C-rat cans or candy off the back of your truck just so the kids will have time to dash out, grab the candy and get run over by the next truck. [Vietnam Veterans Against the War 1972:36]

Stories of this sinister game of gift-giving in which cans of food became weapons and hungry kids the enemy, circulated widely. One account even appears in a poem by Vietnam veteran Bruce Weigl:

> The Last Lie
>
> Some guy in the miserable convoy
> raised up in the back of our open truck
> and threw a can of C rations at a child
> who called into the rumble for food.
> He didn't toss the can, he wound up and hung it
> on the child's forehead and she was stunned
> backwards into the dust of our trucks.
>
> Across the sudden angle of the road's curving
> I could still see her when she rose,
> waving one hand across her swollen, bleeding head,
> wildly swinging her other hand
> at the children who mobbed her,
> who tried to take her food.
>
> I grit my teeth to myself to remember that girl
> smiling as she fought off her brothers and sisters.
> She laughed
>
> as if she thought it were a joke
> and the guy with me laughed
> and fingered the edge of another can
> like it was the seam of a baseball
> until his rage ripped
> again into the faces of children
> who called to us for food.
> [Weigl 1988:18–19]

More complicated than the simple verse of cadence calls, Weigl's poem balances the two contradictory gestures of the soldier (one that offers food and

the other that inflicts pain) with the two hands of the girl (one that secures food, the other that fends off brothers and sisters who threaten to steal it from her). Trapped between these two contradictory alternatives, both the girl and the poem's speaker share the same joke, the awful irony of the war.

Unlike the contemplative narrator, the "guy in the miserable convoy" perceives no ambiguity. He laughs as his pitches rip into the faces of children. He, and not the reflective speaker of Weigl's poem, is the narrator of napalm cadence calls, his rage erupting in hideous delight at the game of war. Such dismal delight infects all battlefield humor: from legends of grunts gone crazy in combat to macabre jokes, from accounts of ear necklaces to stories of photo albums of VC corpses (with their grim mockery of photo journalism). Like these, napalm cadence calls articulate the anger and enthusiasm of the soldier in combat: two emotions, many would argue, that enable the soldier to fight. In preparing thousands to fight and kill, training programs that employ such cadence calls seek to regulate the fears of these young recruits through the perfectly measured recitation of sadistic verse.

Notes

[1]Most of my informants (midshipmen and officers at the Naval Academy) maintained that all but officially approved verses had been censored because of the admission of women. But the fact that women attended the Academy for ten years before such censorship and the fact that other traditional sexist practices in the hall still flourish, suggest that there might be other reasons. A few informants speculated that the administration is today more fearful of the bad PR that might result if civilian tour groups passing through the Academy were to overhear such chants.

What seems to me a more plausible reason (though one missing from official correspondence on the subject) is the administration's desire to shift the officer-in-training's identification from the combat soldier (the marine) to the technically sophisticated officer in the nuclear navy. Representatives of the nuclear power branch of the Navy have recently filled upper-level positions at the Academy, but the Marine Corps places its own senior officers in Academy positions who aggressively recruit from the ranks of midshipmen.

[2]In dealing with overtly sexual or graphically violent cadences, Johnson's omissions are clear. As she says in the introduction to volume II: "I did not completely edit all questionable selections but did remove the most offending verses" (Johnson 1986:7).

[3]This verse from an old bawdy British song has made its way into cadence calls as have verses from other songs, both ancient and contemporary.

[4]An exercise in metaphor making, this call typically continues for five or six more verses comparing "girls" or "ladies" to holes in the road, telephone poles, bats in a steeple, hammers in a shed, bells in the tower, hoops in the gym, nails in a board, fish in the ocean, and clouds in the sky. Familiar to virtually all midshipmen at the Naval Academy three years ago, it is scarcely heard today.

[5]The expression "high and tight" refers to a close-cropped haircut fashionable in the Marine Corps.

[6]Collected from an enlisted marine, Naval Systems, Annapolis, Maryland, 1988.

[7]Several versions contributed by Naval Academy midshipmen, 1986–88.

[8]Collected from an enlisted marine, Naval Systems, Annapolis, Maryland, 1988.

[9]101st Division Electronic Database.

[10]Performed at the Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, 1986.

[11]The quotation is from a tape-recorded interview with Colonel Fred Fagan, U.S.M.C., Annapolis, Maryland, 1 February 1989.

[12]Contributed by a student from Virginia Military Institute, 1988.

[13]Performed at the Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, 1987.

[14]This airborne cadence (Johnson 1983:141) is one of a large body of special forces cadences that have made their way into basic training programs. Although few recruits in army basic training programs and fewer cadets at West Point will ever become airborne rangers, they, nevertheless, adopt the persona of the elite fighter as they train.

[15]Collected from a prior-enlisted marine attending the Naval Academy, 1987.

[16]Performed at the Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, 1987.

[17]"Blood on the Risers" is a song and not a cadence call, yet soldiers occasionally march to it or sing it at an official Army function, one to which civilians are generally not invited. I have quoted only two verses of the 10-verse song, author unknown, contributed by Colonel John Calabro, West Point 14 February 1989.

[18]This cadence and similar cadences in the appendix were performed at the Naval Academy from the early '70s, but recent years have seen efforts to prohibit them. Although not as popular as they once were, they continue to be called in basic training programs.

[19]Performed at the Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, 1982–86.

[20]Collected from an enlisted marine, Naval Systems, Annapolis, Maryland, 1988. In other versions, the children referred to as "fuckers" in the penultimate stanza are called "bastards" and "suckers."

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Appendix

The following are common variants of the napalm cadence calls performed at the Naval Academy until recent efforts to prohibit them. Performance continues in basic training programs and at other military schools. Note the anachronistic F-18s and Tridents, present-day weapons employed in these cadence calls to fight a war of the past.

A.

See the Tomcats flyin' low,
Mach two, oh, is just too slow.

Afterburner, left it flow,
I'm gonna make my Rio glow.

See the Ruskies on their subs.
They're full of a bunch of duds.

They're gonna sink down to the mud
Cause we've got Tridents, girls, and Bud.

See the VC in the jungle,
running down into their tunnel.

Agent Orange is quite the funnel.
Yo Oh, Napalm it sticks to kids.

See the children within the brush
Watchin' their village get all crushed.

My M-16 will make them mush.
Yo, Oh, Napalm it sticks to kids.

See the kiddies in the street
Cryin' and lookin' for som'in to eat.

Drop trick toys that look real neat
Blow up in their face and make 'em all meat.

B.

Napalm, napalm sticks like glue.
Sticks to women and children, too.

Children in a school house trying to learn.
Drop that napalm; watch 'em burn.

F-18 flying high.
Drop the napalm; watch 'em fry.

People in a hospital trying to get well.
Drop that napalm; send 'em to hell.

C.

Cobra skimmin' over the trees
Firin' rockets at the refugees.
We don't care 'cause the ammo's free
and Napalm sticks to kids.

See the family by the stream,
watch the parents run and scream.
Viet Cong will never learn
push a button and watch' em burn.

Nothing more that I'd rather see
than a three-year-old in misery.
We don't care 'cause the ammo's free
and Napalm sticks to kids.

See the orphanage on the hill
call an A-6 airstrike; we're gonna kill.
When the peckerheads start to run
grab an M-16 and have some fun.

A-4 flyin' into the sun
droppin' Napalm on everyone.

If she's pregnant it's two for one
and Napalm sticks to kids.

See the school kids walkin' home
drop some Napalm; they're all gone.
One little boy walks all alone
and Napalm sticks to kids.

See the grandpa on the porch
drop some Napalm; watch him scorch.
Grandpa can't run but he sure can torch,
and Napalm sticks to kids.