

“I Call Square Dances for the Army, Do You?”

by Lovaine Lewis, *The Country Dancer*, July 1942

It was the strangest feeling I've ever had—that first time I called a square dance in an army camp. You see, I'm a woman. That might have had something to do with it—I don't know. Anyway I was scared. My hands felt like two lumps of ice and I was quite sure that when I stepped in front of the mike I simply would not be able to produce my voice.

Then all of a sudden I started thinking—what if I am a woman calling a square dance at an army post? These men know that women are taking over where the men have gone, so women must be calling square dances now too. What if they start booing—I'd heard they sometimes do that. But after all these men are just the boys from back home and they didn't boo there, did they? Boys from back home—that brought something new to my mind. Then they had a first day in an army camp too. They must have been pretty scared that day—or at least they felt differently than they had ever felt before. They probably know this is my first time in a camp. I no doubt show it, so it will just make us have more in common. They'll understand.

Then the girl dancing partners from the near-by town arrived and before I knew it the floor was crowded with people eager to square dance—and it all depended on me. Someway, although now I can't remember how, I stepped to the mike and with “listen to the music and wait for the call,” the dance was on.

No one laughed at me—although I know some who were a little amazed at a woman calling a square dance, especially in an army camp—but after the dance got under way it was all right, even with them.

Intermission time and my longing glance at the canteen for a coke was only a gesture for I was surrounded by happy boys all saying at once, “I come from...”; “Do you know the dance...?”; “You don't dance here like we do at home”; “This is the first time I've gotten the square dance since I've been in the army; it's wonderful”; “How about letting me call one?” And so on—.

You know after weeks of this you get to know some of the boys pretty well—those that haven't been shipped off too soon. I think it's that feeling of having something very important in common. And dancing is terribly important, isn't it? It's not just a form of recreation “cooked up” for life in the army. I recall one boy telling about a representative from a well-intentioned but ill-informed woman's club. She made

inquiries as to what types of recreation they would prefer be made available to them. His answer was, “Lady, just the kind I've always participated in...you see I come from a long line of civilians.” And then too, you realize how much it has all meant when a girl comes to your office and tells you her soldier boy friend is in another camp now, and they didn't have square dancing there, but now he's started it and is doing the calling himself. And he wonders if you could send him some of your calls because they were such fun and he knows the boys in his camp would like some new ones. And a letter received from a private transferred to another camp makes it more worth while too. He writes about starting square dancing in his camp: “I went down to the Special Service Officer (he is a Captain) this morning and talked to him for about thirty minutes (a long time for a high officer like that). He was very glad that I came down to see him. We exchanged ideas and had quite a discussion. He was surprised that anyone would come to him and help out that way. I told him about the dances we had at... and it encouraged him a lot. I wish you were here to start things off... What are you doing now for the boys? I know you won't let them down after all you have already done for them. I won't try to tell you how much the boys appreciate what the ... and ... are doing for them, because you know how they enjoy it.”

And so I look back to my first experience calling square dances at an army camp. I think of so many incidents, and the memories are happy ones. Lots of things were amazing and a little tragic, but most were amusing and I did keep my sense of humor ever present. One important thing I feel now is that army life is good for most boys—it makes real men of them—men who are strong and healthy, and very, very courteous to women square dance callers.

The Country Dancer was a journal published by CDSS from November 1940 to July 1943. It temporarily ceased, because of the war, and returned with the Winter 1948 issue (volume 4, number 1) until its final issue in 1965-1966 (volume 26). This article is from volume 3, numbers 3 and 4).

A second journal, *Country Dance and Song*, was published from 1968 through 1996. *The Country Dancer* and *CD&S* have been PDF'd and will be on our new website this fall. A new online journal, *CD+S Online*, edited by Allison Thompson, will debut in the late fall or early winter.