

# Taps

**Webmaster's Note:** There are two different accounts on the history of "Taps". Both are included for your convenience. Regardless of which account is correct, "Taps" has become associated with paying respect for those fallen heroes who gave their all in service to their country.

**Notable Reading:**

"No disgrace to My Country: The Life of John C. Tidball," by Eugene C. Tidball. Published by Kent State University Press. Order a copy by calling 1-800-247-6553.

## THE ROMANTIC HISTORY OF TAPS

During the Civil War, when Union Army Captain Robert Ellicombe was with his men near Harrison's Landing in Virginia. The Confederate Army was on the other side of the narrow strip of land. Sometime during the night, Captain Ellicombe heard the moan of a soldier who lay mortally wounded on the field.

Not knowing whether or not it was a Union or Confederate soldier, the Captain decided to risk his life and bring the stricken man back for medical attention. Crawling on his stomach through the gunfire across the field, the Captain reached the stricken soldier and began pulling him toward his encampment. When the Captain finally reached his own lines, he discovered it was actually a Confederate soldier, but the soldier was dead.

The Captain lit a lantern. Suddenly, he caught his breath and went numb with shock. In the dimly lit tent, he saw the face of the soldier. It was his own son.

The boy had been studying music in the South when the war broke out. Without telling his father, he enlisted in the Confederate Army. The following morning, heartbroken, the father asked permission of his superiors to give his son a full military burial despite his enemy status. His request was partially granted. The Captain asked if he could have a group of Army band members play at the funeral.

That request was turned down since the soldier was a Confederate. Out of respect for the father, they did say they could give him only one musician. The Captain chose a bugler. He asked the bugler to play a series of 4 musical notes he had found on a piece of paper in the pocket of his dead son's uniform. This wish was granted. This music was the haunting melody we now know as "TAPS" that is now used at all military funerals.

## THE HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF TAPS

Major General Daniel Butterfield was not pleased with the call for Lights Out, feeling that the call was too formal to signal the days end. With the help of the brigade bugler, Oliver Wilcox Norton, Butterfield wrote Taps to honor his men while in camp at Harrison's Landing, Virginia, following the Seven Day's battle. These battles took place during the Peninsular Campaign of 1862. The call, sounded that night in July, 1862, soon spread to other units of the Union Army and was even used by the Confederates. Taps was made an official bugle call after the war.

The first use of Taps at a funeral was during the Peninsular Campaign in Virginia. Captain John C. Tidball of Battery A, 2nd Artillery ordered it played for the burial of a cannoner killed in action. Since the enemy was close, he worried that the traditional 3 volleys would renew fighting.

During the Peninsular Campaign in 1862, a soldier of Tidball's Battery - A of the 2nd Artillery - was buried at a time when the battery occupied an advanced position, concealed in the woods. It was unsafe to fire the customary three volleys over the grave on account of the proximity of the enemy, and it occurred to Captain Tidball that the sounding of Taps would be the most ceremony that would be substituted. The custom was taken up throughout the Army of the Potomac, and finally confirmed by orders.

The following are the words to "TAPS":

Day is done  
Gone the sun  
From the lakes  
From the hills  
From the sky  
All is well  
Safely rest  
God is nigh....

- Author Unknown