

# THE HISTORY OF TAPS

We in the United States have all heard the haunting melody of “Tapes”. It’s the sound that gives us that lump in our throats and usually tears in our eyes, *but do you know the story behind the song?* If not, I think you will be interested to find out about its humble beginnings.

There are two versions of Taps origin, both of which were during the Civil War in July 1862. One is based on Capt. Robert Ellicombe’s account (considered to be a myth), and the other by Brig Gen. Daniel Butterfield’s account, considered to be fact! A good source of information can be found by typing in, *Arlington National Cemetery* or *Taps* on the Internet. In either case, Taps is a great part of our military and ceremonial traditions. As Capt. Robert Ellicombe’s version is the shortest, I provide his following account.

**Reportedly, it all began in 1862 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.**

**During the night, Capt Ellicombe heard the moans of a soldier who lay severely wounded on the battle field. Not knowing if 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 gun fire, 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 and suddenly caught his breath and went numb with shock. In the dim light, 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, the boy enlisted in the Confederate Army.**

**The following morning, heartbroken, his father asked permission of his superiors to give his son a full military burial, despite his enemy status. His request was only partially granted.**

**The Captain had asked if he could have a group of Army band members play a funeral dirge for his son at the funeral. The request was turned down since the soldier was a Confederate. But, 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 musical notes he had found on a piece of paper in the pocket of the dead youth's uniform.**

*This wish was granted and the haunting melody, we now know as "TAPS" used at military funerals, was born.*

I, too, have felt the chills while listening to "TAPS" but I never seen all the words to the song until now. I didn't even know there was more than one verse. I also never knew the story behind the song and didn't know if you had either ... so pass it along. I now have an even deeper respect for the melody than I did before!

**Capt. Ellicomb's version**

*Day is done, gone the sun,  
From the hills, from the lake,  
From the skies.  
All is well, safely rest,  
God is nigh.*

*Go to sleep, peaceful sleep,  
May the soldier and the sailor,  
God to keep.  
On the land or the deep,  
Safe in sleep.*

*Love, good night, must thou go,  
When the day and the night,  
Need thee so.  
All is well, speedeth all,  
To their rest.*

*Fades the light and afar,  
Goeth day and the stars,  
Shineth bright.  
Fare thee well day has gone,  
Night is on.*

*Thanks and praise for our days,  
Neath the sun neath the stars,  
Neath the sky.  
As we go this is know,  
God is nigh.*

**the words are:**



**Maj Gen. Butterfield's version**

*Fading light dims the sight,  
And a star gems the sky,  
Gleaming bright.  
From afar drawing nigh,  
Falls the night.*

*Day is done, gone the sun,  
From the lake, from the hills,  
From the sky.  
All is well, safely rest,  
God is nigh.*

*Then good night, peaceful night  
Till the light of the dawn,  
Shineth bright.  
God is near, do not fear,  
Friend good night.*