

We in the United States have all heard the haunting song, "Taps." It's the song that gives us that lump in our throats and usually tears in our eyes. It is the song used when we bury our fallen, especially our military. It is also used to signify the end of a days activities (lights out). But, do you know the story behind the song? If not, you will be interested to find out about its humble beginnings.

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, Captain Ellicombe heard the moans of a soldier who lay severely wounded on the 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 gunfire, 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, the 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.

The haunting melody, we now know as "Taps" ... used at military funerals was born.

The words of the tune are:

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

Fading light
Dims the sight
And a star gems the sky gleaming bright
From afar, drawing nigh
Falls the night.

Thanks and praise
For our days
Neath the sun, neath the stars, neath the sky
As we go, this we know

God is nigh.

I hope that this gives an even deeper respect for the song than it had before. May you also take the time to learn the final two verses, they are just as powerful as the first verse.