

Source:

<http://usmilitary.about.com/od/theorderlyroom/a/tapshistory.htm>

Of all the military bugle calls, none is so easily recognized or more apt to render emotion than [Taps](#). Up to the Civil War, the traditional call at day's end was a tune, borrowed from the French, called Lights Out. In July of 1862, in the aftermath of the bloody Seven Days battles, hard on the loss of 600 men and wounded himself, Union General Daniel Adams Butterfield called the brigade bugler to his tent. He thought "Lights Out" was too formal and he wished to honor his men.

Oliver Wilcox Norton, the bugler, tells the story, "...showing me some notes on a staff written in pencil on the back of an envelope, (he) asked me to sound them on my bugle. I did this several times, playing the music as written. He changed it somewhat, lengthening some notes and shortening others, but retaining the melody as he first gave it to me. After getting it to his satisfaction, he directed me to sound that call for Taps thereafter in place of the regulation call. The music was beautiful on that still summer night and was heard far beyond the limits of our Brigade. The next day I was visited by several buglers from neighboring Brigades, asking for copies of the music which I gladly furnished. The call was gradually taken up through the Army of the Potomac."

This more emotive and powerful Taps was soon adopted throughout the military. In 1874 It was officially recognized by the U.S. Army. It became standard at military funeral ceremonies in 1891. There is something singularly beautiful and appropriate in the music of this wonderful call. Its strains are melancholy, yet full of rest and peace. Its echoes linger in the heart long after its tones have ceased to vibrate in the air.

The origin of the word "Taps" is thought to have come from the Dutch word for "Tattoo"- "Taptoe." More than likely, "Taps" comes from the the three drum taps that were played as a signal for "Extinguish Lights" when a bugle was not used. As with many other customs, the twenty-four notes that comprise this solemn tradition began long ago and continue to this day.

Day is done, gone the sun,  
From the lake, 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.

Sun has set, shadows come,  
Time has fled, Scouts must go, to their beds  
Always true, to the promise, that they made.

While the light, fades from sight,  
And the stars, gleaming rays, softly send,  
To thy hands, we our souls, Lord, commend.