

THE STORY BEHIND “TAPS”.

We in the United States have all heard the haunting song, “TAPS”. It’s the song that gives us the 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.

Reportedly, it all began in 1862 during the Civil War, when Union Army Captain Robert Elli 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 Elli 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 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 asked if he could have a group of Army band members play a funeral dirge for his son at the burial. The request was turned down since the soldier was a Confederate. However, out of respect for the father, they did say they would give him 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 funeral was born. The words to the melody 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.
Thanks and praise. For our days.
Neath the sun, Neath the stars. Neath the sky.
As we go, This we know, God is nigh.*

So, when you hear “Taps” you now know the story and the words that were written so long ago.