

# History of Taps



*US Army bugler Sergeant George Myers, sounding Taps at Arlington National Cemetery. Sergeant Myers is wearing the Pershing Grey uniform the Army Band wore during World War II.*

Of all the military bugle calls, none is so easily recognized or more apt to render emotion than the call Taps. The melody is both eloquent and haunting and the history of its origin is interesting and somewhat clouded in controversy. In the British Army, a similar type call known as Last Post has been sounded over soldiers' graves since 1885, but the use of Taps is unique to the United States military, since the call is sounded at funerals, wreath-laying and memorial services.



*Bugler sounding Taps at the Tomb of the Unknowns*

Taps began as a revision to the signal for Extinguish Lights (Lights Out) at the end of the day. Up until the Civil War, the infantry call for Extinguish Lights was the one set down in Silas Casey's (1801-1882) Tactics, which had been borrowed from the French. Union General Daniel Butterfield adapted the music for Taps for his brigade (Third Brigade, First Division, Fifth Army Corps, Army of the Potomac) in July 1862.



*Daniel Butterfield*

Daniel Adams Butterfield (1831-1901) was born in Utica, New York and graduated from Union College at Schenectady. He was the eastern superintendent of the American Express Company in New York when the Civil War broke out. A Colonel in the 12th Regiment of the New York State Militia, he was promoted to Brigadier General and given command of a brigade of the 5th Corps of the Army of the Potomac.

During the Peninsular Campaign Butterfield distinguished himself when, during the Battle of Gaines Mill and despite an injury, he seized the colors of the 83rd Pennsylvania and rallied the regiment at a critical time in the battle. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for that act of heroism.



*Left: Brigade Flag of Butterfield's 3rd Brigade, 1st Division, 5th Corps, Army of the Potomac*



*Right: Items relating to Daniel Butterfield - two bugles, Medal of Honor, his presentation spurs from his officers, and his duty sword.*

As the story goes, General Butterfield was not pleased with the call for Extinguish Lights, feeling that the call was too formal to signal the days end, and with the help of the brigade bugler, Oliver Willcox Norton (1839-1920), wrote Taps to honor his men while in camp at Harrison's Landing, Virginia, following the Seven Days battle. These battles took place during the Peninsular Campaign of 1862. The new call, sounded that night in July, 1862, soon spread to other units of the Union Army and was reportedly also used by the Confederates. Taps was made an official bugle call after the war.