

Broken Hearts are Comforted With the Song “Taps”.

May 30th is a very special day for Americans. It is the day we honor our dead. It is always a thrill to visit the cemetery and see the field of American flags flying the headstones or markers of our military dead. It is a very humbling experience to think about the men and women who have given their lives in war so we can enjoy freedom in ways most people on the earth do not experience. We in the United States have all heard the haunting song – “Taps.” It is the song 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.

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 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 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 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 nigh. 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, too, have felt the chills while listening to “Taps” but I have 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 I didn’t know if you had either, so I thought I would pass it along. I now have an even deeper respect for the song than I had before.

**Remember those lost and harmed while serving their country, and also those presently serving in the Armed forces.
God Bless America!**

This lovely story came in email.

Submitted by Phyllis M. Hansen, MSW, Grief Counselor