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Memorial Day 2012

In Remembrance

“Taps.” Of all the military bugle calls, none is so easily or emotionally recognized. The haunting 24-note melody originally began before the Civil War as a revision to “Extinguish Lights,” the lights-out signal at the end of the day.

It's hard to feel surprised when a melody as hauntingly beautiful as Taps picks up a legend about how it came to be written — it's too mournfully direct a piece for the mere truth to suffice. While many other interesting stories have been passed around, dating back at least to the 1930's, the old ‘truth is stranger than fiction’ applies to the true account of the first time taps was played to end a day of fighting for our soldiers in the field as noted on our enclosure.

In deepest gratitude, we pause on Memorial Day to remember our loved ones, our ancestors, and our friends who gave the ultimate sacrifice in our nation's conflicts and wars—not to honor war, but rather those who died in honorable service.

As we remember our country's most recent fallen heroes, please join me in remembering them and their loved ones as Taps plays in our minds.

*Day is done, gone the sun
From the hills, from the lake, from the sky.
All is well, safely rest.
God is nigh.*

From all of us at Certified Financial Group, Inc.

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TAPS

Taps was composed in July 1862 at Harrison's Landing in Virginia. If anyone can be said to have composed Taps, it was Brig. Gen. Daniel Butterfield, Commander of the 3rd Brigade, 1st Division, V Army Corps, Army of the Potomac, during the American Civil War.

Dissatisfied with the customary firing of three rifle volleys at the conclusion of burials during battle and also wanting a less harsh bugle call for ceremonially signaling the end of a soldier's day, he likely altered an older piece known as "Tattoo," a French bugle call used to signal "lights out," into the call we now know as Taps.

Summoning his brigade's bugler, Private Oliver Willcox Norton, to his tent one evening in July 1862, Butterfield (whether he wrote Taps straight from the cuff or improvised something new by rearranging an older work) worked with the bugler to transform the melody into its present form. As Private Norton later wrote of that occasion:

“General Daniel Butterfield ... showing me some notes on a staff written in pencil on the back of an envelope, 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. I think no general order was issued from army headquarters authorizing the substitution of this for the regulation call, but as each brigade commander exercised his own discretion in such minor matters, the call was gradually taken up through the Army of the Potomac.”



Taps was quickly taken up by both sides of the conflict, and within months was being sounded by buglers in both Union and Confederate forces.

Then as now, Taps serves as a vital component in ceremonies honoring military dead. It is also understood by American servicemen as an end-of-day 'lights out' signal. When Taps is played at a military funeral, it is customary to salute if in uniform, or place your hand over your heart if not.

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