

Volume 17

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A House Divided: (35) – Origin of
Taps

Lead: One hundred and fifty years ago the Republic was facing its greatest crisis. This continuing series examines the American Civil War. It is *A House Divided*.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Despite appalling losses on both sides, Robert E. Lee's rebel forces had hammered and ultimately thwarted the timid George C. McClellan's grand attempt to take Richmond, the

Confederate capital, in spring 1862. During the Seven Day's Battles in June, the Union Army had been forced to retreat southeast to Harrison's Landing. Many of the units in the Army of the Potomac bivouacked on Berkeley Plantation, the mansion of which was built in 1726. Berkeley is situated on a bluff above the James River and is the traditional home of the Harrison family which sired two Presidents of the United States.

During that difficult summer when the soldiers of the Union Army confronted the melancholy fact that the Civil War was neither going to be short nor bloodless,

there emerged one of the most poignant traditions of military life. Utica, New York native, Brigadier General Daniel Butterfield commanded the Third Brigade of the Fifth Army Corps. At Gaines Mill on June 27th, Butterfield's brigade shielded the withdrawal of the Fifth Corps but in doing so endured horrendous losses - over 600 casualties.

It was the custom in an era of poor battlefield communications for each brigade commander to commission an easily identified bugle call to signal his intentions to his men. Often these officers were involved in choosing these signals

or bugle calls and Butterfield no exception. He had his own distinct bugle call. Butterfield also did not particularly like the existing bugle call instructing men to go sleep at the end of the day. The Army was using an older piece of music from Major General Winfield Scott's *Manual of Infantry Tactics*. Butterfield called in his young bugler, Private Oliver W. Norton and together they adapted the last 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ measures of No. 8 *Tattoo*, stretched and slowed the notes to Butterfield's satisfaction, and created *Taps*, one of the most familiar tunes in human history.

Played in the active services as a signal for the end of the day,

beginning almost immediately in that depressing summer of 1862, It entered the bugle repertoire of both northern and southern armies. Ever since the deeply sad and moving twenty-four notes of *Taps* has been used in military funerals and at the burials of those who have with distinction served their country.

In Richmond, Virginia, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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