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Editorial, Advertising and Circulation

Offices: Box 1831, Harrisburg,

Pa. 17105 (717) 234-5091.

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COVER: The monument erected to honor Civil War newspaper correspondents by George Alfred Townsend on his estate, "Gapland," just outside of Frederick, Maryland. An article on the War Correspondents Memorial begins on page 10. Photograph by Edward Wilson.

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Butterfield

and "Taps"

*What really happened at
Harrison's Landing in 1862?*

By Russell H. Booth

For many years the name of Major General Daniel Butterfield has been synonymous with "Taps". Any student of the Civil War period will tell you that Butterfield is best remembered for composing "Taps." He may add details and tell you that in July 1862, shortly after the battle of Malvern Hill and while the army was in the vicinity of Harrison's Landing, Major General Butterfield called a bugler into his tent one night after the regulation call for "extinguish lights" had been sounded throughout the camps, whistled a new call, modified it a few times until he had it just the way he wanted it, had the bugler write it down, and then instructed him to use the new call in place of the regulation one for "extinguish lights". Other buglers heard it, played it, and eventually the whole army was using it—the call we know today as "Taps."

But is this tradition true? Did Butterfield actually compose a new call that evening at Harrison's Landing? The evidence indicates that he was simply revising an earlier call, one that had been in use in the army for many years prior to the Civil War.

That earlier call is the last 5¼ bars of the "Tattoo" set forth in at least three different drill manuals published well before the Civil War began. Those manuals are the Scott, Cooper, and Gilham manuals, published in 1835, 1836, and 1861 respectively. The call is identical in all three manuals and will be referred to simply as the Scott Tattoo. It is possible, however, that the call is of even earlier, foreign origin, for Scott based much of his manual, including the bugle calls, upon the French system in use at that time.

That night in the tent at Harrison's Landing, Butterfield was revising the Scott Tattoo into the Taps that we know today. His contribution to "Taps" consisted mainly of slowing the older call down a little and modifying the timing of some of the notes at the end. The melody, aside from the first note, was left intact. To believe that Butterfield was composing Taps "from scratch" is to place an extraordinary amount of faith in coincidence in view of the existence of the earlier call.

CUT #1



Major General Daniel Butterfield made an improvement on the original bugle call "Taps."

How, then, did the Butterfield story get started?

It had its beginnings in an article in the August 1898, issue of *The Century Magazine* entitled "The Trumpet in Camp and Battle" by Gustav Kobbe, a distinguished music historian and critic. At that time the Army was using the manual on Infantry Tactics prepared by Major General Emory Upton in 1867, and subsequently revised. Mr. Kobbe points out that the bugle calls set forth in that manual—which includes the Taps as we know it today—were compiled by a Major Truman Seymour, and after discussing at some length the origins of some of the calls, has this to say about Taps:

I have not been able to trace this call to any other service. If, as seems probable, it was original with Major Seymour, he has given our army the most beautiful of all trumpet-calls.

This article was read by Major O.W. Norton, a former bugler in Butterfield's Brigade, and he sent a letter to the *Century*, portions of which follow:

... Up to July, 1862, the infantry call for Taps was that set down in Casey's Tactics, which Mr. Kobbe says was borrowed from the French. One day, soon after the seven days' battles on the Peninsular, when the Army of the Potomac was lying in camp at Harrison's Landing, General Daniel Butterfield, then commanding our Brigade, sent for me, and 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. . . . I did not presume to question General Butterfield at the time, but from the manner in which the call was given to me, I have no doubt he composed it in his tent at Harrison's Landing . . .

Notice that the incident begins with notes already on an envelope. Then, in Norton's presence, Butterfield "changed it somewhat, *lengthening some notes and shortening others, but retaining the melody as he first gave it to me.*" With the exception of the first note, this is precisely all that has to be done to change the Scott Tattoo into Taps.

The editor of *Century* then contacted Butterfield, and Butterfield responded, in part, as follows:

I recall, in dim memory, the substantial truth of the statement made by Norton, of the 83d Pa., about bugle calls. His letter gives the impression that I personally wrote the notes for the call. The facts are, that at that time I could well sound calls on the bugle as a necessary part of military knowledge and instruction for an officer commanding a regiment or brigade. I had acquired this as a regimental commander. . . .

TAPS.





Zouave bugler (left) and Pennsylvania Bucktail bugler (on mule) at an Army sutler's store.

The call of Taps did not seem to be as smooth, melodious and musical as it should be, and I called in some one who could write music, and practiced a change in the call of Taps until I had it to suit my ear, and then, as Norton writes, got it to my taste without being able to write music or knowing the technical name of any note, but, simply by ear, arranged it as Norton describes. . . .

Notice that Butterfield's own words would seem to better describe slight modifications of an existing call than the composition of an entirely new call—"The call of Taps did not seem as smooth, melodious and musical as *it should be*" "practiced a *change* in the call of Taps until I had it to suit my ear" "*arranged* it as Norton described."

Nevertheless, the story of Butterfield having composed Taps was on its way and has been told and retold many times in the years since the turn of the century.

As to the facts stated in Norton's letter, there is no reason to doubt or dispute them. The incident probably happened just as related by Norton, and confirmed by Butterfield. It is of the conclusion reached by Norton that Butterfield was, then and there, "composing" the call that there can be some doubt.

How can Norton's conclusion be explained? By the simple fact that evidently Norton was not familiar with the Scott Tattoo. If he had been, he would have recognized it immediately and would not have credited Butterfield with coming up with a new call. Norton himself says that the regulation call at that time for Taps (extinguish lights) was that set forth in Casey's Tactics. And that call is nothing like the Taps that we know today.

CVT #2

It is little wonder then that the call shown to Norton by Butterfield seemed like a new call to Norton. And when Butterfield started changing it until he had it just the way he wanted it, Norton's conclusion that the call was, then and there, being composed by Butterfield is perfectly understandable.

Finally, is there any evidence that Butterfield was familiar with the Scott Tattoo prior to "composing" Taps?

Yes. At least, he possessed the Scott manual and used it earlier in his career. Proof of this is found in General Order No. 1, issued by Butterfield on December 7, 1859, while he was colonel of the 22d Regiment, New York State Militia. This order, among other things, contains the following paragraph:

The Officers and non-commissioned Officers are expected to be thoroughly familiar with the first thirty pages, Vol. 1, Scott's Tactics, and ready to answer any questions in regard to same previous to the drill above ordered.

The bugle calls are contained in the same volume of Scott's Tactics as that referred to above. Since Butterfield was using the Scott manual for drill purposes, he would probably also have been using the bugle calls as set forth in the same manual. Thus, he would have been familiar with the Scott Tattoo. Further evidence that this would have been the case is found in his letter to the *Century* in which he states that, although he could not write a note of music, "I could well sound calls on the bugle as a necessary part of military knowledge and instruction for an officer commanding a regiment of brigade. I had acquired this as a regimental commander."

For the sake of historical accuracy, then let us give General Butterfield credit for having revised a portion of an earlier bugle call into a much better call. But let us not continue to say that he composed an entirely new call. It makes a good story, but it is just not true. The earlier call was in print and in use long before Butterfield ever joined the army.



Library of Congress

Official representation of what the correctly dressed bugler should wear.

Major O. W. Norton, a member of Butterfield's Brigade, writing from Chicago to the editor of the "Century" Magazine, August 8, 1898, says:

CHICAGO, Aug. 8, 1898.

"I was much interested in reading the article by Mr. Gustav Kobbe, on 'Trumpet and Bugle Calls,' in the August 'Century.' Mr. Kobbe says that he has been unable to trace the origin of the call now used for Taps, or the 'Go-to-sleep,' as it is generally called by the soldiers. As I am able to give the origin of this call, I think the following statement may be of interest to Mr. Kobbe and your readers.

"During the early part of the Civil War I was bugler at the headquarters of Butterfield's Brigade, Morell's Division, Fitz-John Porter's Corps, Army of the Potomac. Up to July, 1862, the infantry call for Taps was that set down in Casey's Tactics, which Mr. Kobbe says was borrowed from the French. One day, soon after the seven days' battles on the Peninsular, when the Army of the Potomac was lying in camp at Harrison's Landing, General Daniel Butterfield, then commanding our Brigade, sent for me, and 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 all through the Army of the Potomac. I have been told that it was carried to the Western Armies by the 11th and 12th Corps, when they went to Chattanooga, in the fall of 1863, and rapidly made its