

BRIEF HISTORY ON TAPS

Courtesy from Marty Martinez, Harker Heights Veterans Council Member

THE BUGLE CALL

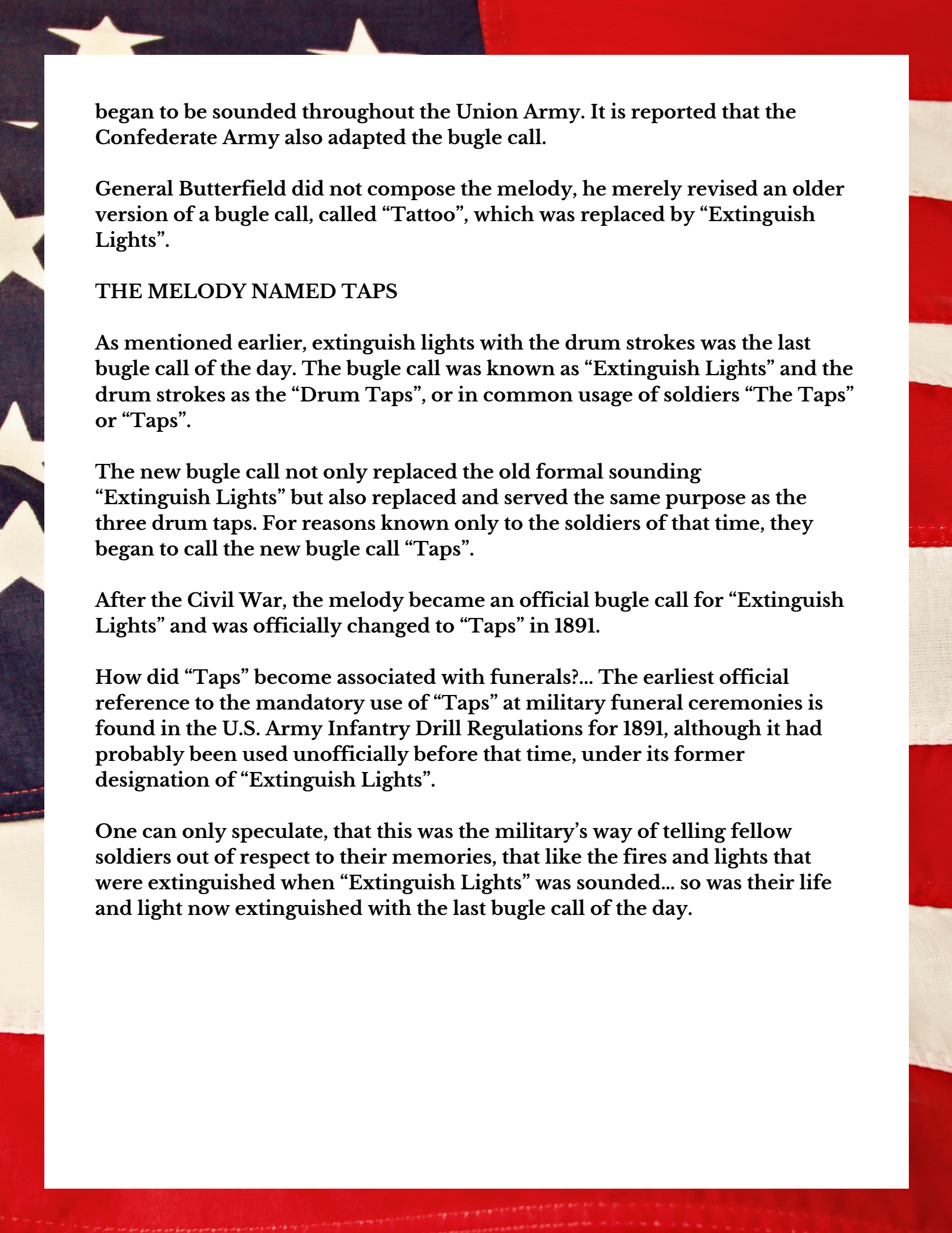
A firing squad comes to attention, and then fires three volleys of shots; after the briefest of moments, a bugler sounds the twenty-four notes of America's most famous bugle call. A bugle call that beckons everyone who hears it, to remember the patriots who served their country with honor and valor. The melody is both eloquent and haunting, and one that moves all who hear it. Of all the military bugle calls, none is so easily recognized or more apt to render emotion than that of "Taps".

HOW IT BEGAN

There are many stories about the origin of Taps which are very interesting and some that are clouded in controversy. However; research shows that a Union General by the name of Daniel Butterfield was not pleased and disliked the bugle call of "Extinguish Lights"; when that bugle call was finished it was followed by three single drum strokes that were beat at four count intervals. "Extinguish Lights" was the final bugle call of the day, and it notified all the soldiers to cease the day's activities, and to extinguish all fires and lights within the post or camp. General Butterfield felt that the bugle call to "Extinguish Lights" was too formal to end the day's activities. So, in his mind, he began to formulate ideas as to how the bugle call could be revised or changed.

During the Civil War in July of 1862, following a seven day battle known as the Peninsular Campaign, General Butterfield sent for Oliver Norton the Brigade bugler, and gave him some notes that were written on the back of an envelope, and asked Norton to play them on his bugle. Retaining the same melody that Norton started with, he then had him lengthen some of the notes and shorten others, General Butterfield had Norton play the notes until they were arranged to his listening satisfaction. General Butterfield then directed Norton that from that day forward, the revised version of "Extinguish Lights" would be sounded in place of the regulation bugle call which he disliked.

That night, for the very first time, the new revised bugle call of "Extinguish Lights" was sounded; not only was it heard within the Brigade area, but also by other units that were outside the Brigade's limits. Shortly thereafter it

The background of the page is a close-up of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The stars are white on a dark blue field, and the stripes are red and white.

began to be sounded throughout the Union Army. It is reported that the Confederate Army also adapted the bugle call.

General Butterfield did not compose the melody, he merely revised an older version of a bugle call, called “Tattoo”, which was replaced by “Extinguish Lights”.

THE MELODY NAMED TAPS

As mentioned earlier, extinguish lights with the drum strokes was the last bugle call of the day. The bugle call was known as “Extinguish Lights” and the drum strokes as the “Drum Taps”, or in common usage of soldiers “The Taps” or “Taps”.

The new bugle call not only replaced the old formal sounding “Extinguish Lights” but also replaced and served the same purpose as the three drum taps. For reasons known only to the soldiers of that time, they began to call the new bugle call “Taps”.

After the Civil War, the melody became an official bugle call for “Extinguish Lights” and was officially changed to “Taps” in 1891.

How did “Taps” become associated with funerals?... The earliest official reference to the mandatory use of “Taps” at military funeral ceremonies is found in the U.S. Army Infantry Drill Regulations for 1891, although it had probably been used unofficially before that time, under its former designation of “Extinguish Lights”.

One can only speculate, that this was the military’s way of telling fellow soldiers out of respect to their memories, that like the fires and lights that were extinguished when “Extinguish Lights” was sounded... so was their life and light now extinguished with the last bugle call of the day.