



I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name. (Exodus 15:1-3)

With Memorial Day waiting in the wings for our reverential observance, I will present this short devotion on a little jingle (and hymn) that every American soldier, since 1862, has either slept in security at the hearing, or been laid to rest in the eternal shrouds of his Lord – Taps. I cannot count the times that the bugler (and they had REAL buglers in my days) played Taps in Central Area as we prepared for lights out. Most soldiers and seaman know the tune, but not the words. They may never have heard the words sung to this bewitching melody of Taps. But there are, indeed, words that qualify Taps to be a hymn. Today, the jingle is more often played by screeching loudspeaker thereby losing much of its character. Taps was first employed (and composed) by General Daniel Butterfield of the Army of the Potomac. It rapidly spread throughout the Union, and even Confederate, Army.

The Bugle call has its origins in the War Between the States, or the Civil War to those north of the Mason Dixon Line. According to Jari Vilanueva of the Arlington Bugle Exhibit, the lyrics are as follows:

Taps

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

Go to sleep, peaceful sleep,
May the soldier or sailor,
God keep.
On the land or the deep,
Safe in sleep.

Love, good night, Must thou go,
When the day, And the night
Need thee so?
All is well. Speedeth all
To their rest.

Fades the light; And afar
Goeth day, And the stars
Shineth bright,
Fare thee well; Day has gone,
Night is on.

Thanks and praise, For our days,
'Neath the sun, Neath the stars,
'Neath the sky,
As we go, This we know,
God is nigh.

Though I most often heard this bugle call as a cadet, I have heard it as well on many far-flung shores from Japan to Chiangmai; and Robinson Barracks (Stuttgart) to Brussels, Belgium. It almost always has had a quieting effect on my soul; but there were other times when its haunting notes brought grief and sorrow as when a good soldier was laid to rest – including my younger brother. The notes echo and re-echo from the surrounding ridges and hillsides; and creates the most melancholy of emotions.

“Day is done, gone the sun, From the hills, from the lake, From the sky. All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.” There is no better time than at the closing of the day for one to reflect on his mortality. Every day is really a short life, and perhaps all that we can claim as ours. The light fades and the shadows lengthen, and our work is finished. It is then time for rest – either of the body, or the final rest of the soul. We may forever feel secure knowing that we are under the watchful eye and protection of God our Father whatever the venue.

“Go to sleep, peaceful sleep, May the soldier or sailor, God keep. On the land or the deep, Safe in sleep.” How hardly does a little child fight the gathering sands of sleep before finally surrendering to its inevitable advance. So do many fight the advancing hand of death as if that would herald the end of their existence for all time and eternity – but it does not. We all have made a bed to sleep in someplace and that is either Heaven or Hell. God has numbered the hairs of the soldier’s head just as He has numbered those of the old widow. Wherever the soldier, seaman, or airman finds himself, God is there over-watching. He is able to keep our souls in the mud trenches of Meuse-Argonne or the depths of the seas of Guadalcanal.

“Love, good night, Must thou go, When the day, And the night Need thee so? All is well. Speedeth all To their rest.” This line illustrates the heart-breaking moment when the loving homemaker must say goodbye to her valiant soldier. Though her valor is not exceeded by his, she comes to the moment when *“the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl be broken.”* There is a temporary finality of good-bye that always seems eternal for love makes it so. But remember, that we must all go to our rest at the timing and discretion of our Maker. To quote the Family Prayer of the Book of Common Prayer for Night: *“O LORD, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in thy mercy grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.”*

"Fades the light; And afar Goeth day, And the stars Shineth bright, Fare thee well; Day has gone, Night is on." At the moment of our falling to sleep, the light dims and vanishes, and our souls may rest from its labors. The same is true of the sleep of death. The imitation lights of the world fade and our souls are drawn inextricably to a far greater Light beyond the Gates of Splendor. The Great Night of the Soul is our final sleep, and one from which we have only one awakening if we are secure in our election in Christ. Even in the darkness of the sleep of death, we have that Bright and Morning Star as our Guiding Star to safe lodging.

"Thanks and praise, For our days, 'Neath the sun, 'Neath the stars, 'Neath the sky, As we go, This we know, God is nigh." May I begin this explanation with a question? What do you truly own? Do you own your home, your day, your very body? No, you own nothing at all. Our only possession lies in Christ our Maker. So we must be thankful for every good gift from the Father of Lights. That means, EVERYTHING! Having God as the repository of that which we cannot, of our own accord, possess, is a guarantee of our continued use and possession of it. Our treasures are in Heaven, else we have no treasures. THANKFULNESS is the key to joy and happiness. A thankful heart is full of praise to God for everything that comes his way.

When the bugler sounds Ta[ps at your Memorial Day celebrations, consider the words as well as the plaintive notes. It will make the Bugle Call much more meaningful to your heart; and it will prepare you to stand muster to the Call from the Bugler on High when He summons.