



Taps Our Duty provides proper military burial services for deceased veterans.

Paying the Ultimate Tribute to Veterans

BY RICHARD BARRETT
PHOTOS: TAPS OUR DUTY

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

The music for this famous bugle call was written and arranged by Union Army

Brigadier Gen. Daniel Butterfield, a native Utican, around the time of the Civil War, and it eventually became what is known today as "Taps." It was officially recognized by the United States Army in 1874 and became a standard component to U.S. military funerals in 1891. The words were added later by Horace Lorenzo Trim.

Today, the title is included in the name of a local business that was established to provide proper military burial services to those who have

courageously served this country and to honor the sacrifice and contributions they made.

"Without these guys before us, we wouldn't have the rights and freedoms we enjoy today," said Mark Williamson, founder and president of Taps Our Duty. "We owe them a debt of gratitude."

Williamson, a retired U.S. Navy Command Master Chief who served for 23 years, also wanted to pay tribute to the little-known fact that a Utican was responsible for composing

the music for a well-known bugle call that is still played every single day somewhere in the U.S.

"We never took full ownership of Gen. Butterfield in this community for a song that's played every day in this country," Williamson noted. "His Medal of Honor and his papers and his swords are in the Oneida County Historical Society. I feel it's our duty to do the right thing for these veterans but I also wanted to recognize General Butterfield's

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Retired U.S. Navy Command Master Chief Mark Williamson

contribution because a lot of people don't realize it."

The concept for Taps Our Duty began taking shape when Williamson, as a retired U.S. Navy vet and Junior ROTC instructor at Proctor High School, began attending calling hours to pay his

respects to deceased local veterans.

"It ticked me off when there would be a flag by a vet's head when it actually belongs on the casket," he said. "There are certain rules to be followed and they usually aren't. A lot of times, funeral homes put a floral spray on the casket

instead and place the flag on a stand nearby. That's not proper military burial protocol."

Williamson recalls the recent death of the last Pearl Harbor survivor from the area and nothing special had been done to recognize his service to country.

"It was just a regular wake and I sat in the back and said to myself that something's missing," Williamson explained. "It's not right." So Williamson had several of his ROTC cadets stand guard by the casket with their rifles. "And if I didn't have that, he would have had nothing. But I couldn't use these kids all the time."

Williamson started putting his ideas for a military wake configuration service down on paper and sent them to the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Before long,

he received a letter telling him he was the first inventor to file. He currently has a patent pending and after dozens of trials where he fine-tuned his business model, he's ready to launch it on a much grander scale. By doing so, he's creating opportunities for veterans to take the model he created and become business owners themselves.

According to Williamson's research taken from Census Bureau statistics, there are about 18,000 veterans residing in Oneida County; more than 10,000 in Herkimer and Madison counties combined; and an astonishing 985,000 in New York State alone. Nationwide, the number is more than 24 million. That's a huge market and nothing would please Williamson more than to have Taps Our Duty

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programs in every state. There is virtually no investment required and he's already gotten calls from all over the country to duplicate this service. He's invested about \$25,000 of his own money into purchasing the materials for a turnkey operation, which include service branch and American flags, area carpets with service branch seals, velour ropes, artillery bullets, triangle flag holders, and grave and limousine flag holders.

"It's a beautiful concept where we can hire them and they can have ownership of a company and their own territory," he said. "Here's an opportunity for them with all the talk about hiring vets and creating jobs for vets. It can have a big economic impact on their lives and where they live."

For \$399, Taps Our Duty will work with the deceased veteran's family and funeral home to set up a viewing area around the casket that creates what Williamson describes as "a sacred space, a sanctuary" outfitted with properly arranged flags and seals associated with the vets' branch of service. Military music is played in the background. The family receives a free triangle flag holder along with flag holders for the grave marker and



Williamson is marketing the burial service to veterans nationwide as a business opportunity.

procession. He encourages families of deceased veterans to inquire about the service when making arrangements.

Williamson based his concept on John Paul Jones' (Father of the U.S. Navy) tomb at the Naval Academy. "It's surrounded by velour ropes,

and immediately you know it's something special. You walk in and you are wowed."

So are the families of the veterans who have availed themselves of Williamson's services. Local businessman Stosh Babiarz, who served in the Army Signal Corps during

the Korean War and who belongs to several veterans' organizations, enlisted Taps Our Duty following the death of his lifelong friend and U.S. Navy World War II veteran Judge Stanley Wolanin.

"It was done beautifully and the set up really enhanced the service," Babiarz said. "His family's reaction was unbelievable. They were crying but it was tears of joy, not sadness. Mark is very dedicated and does a great job."

Williamson acknowledges that operating Taps Our Duty requires a significant time commitment in addition to working full-time as an instructor at Proctor High School and serving on Utica's Common Council. Undoubtedly, it's a labor of love for the Eagle Scout whose entire family served in the military. It's also about making a difference in the community.

A commandant in the US Marine Corps once gave him a piece of advice that he carries with him today.

"You do as much as you can for as long as you can for as many people as you can because after awhile, you can't."

Oooooorah!

For more information, visit tapsour duty.com

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