

Address to the Brothers of the Department of Ohio

Brothers of the Department of Ohio,

It is an honor and a privilege to stand before you today as Commander-in-Chief of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. I bring you the fraternal greetings, admiration, and sincere appreciation of our entire Order.

Brothers, the Department of Ohio occupies a place of extraordinary distinction in both the history of our Order and the history of our nation.

When the Republic was threatened by civil war, Ohio answered President Lincoln's call with unparalleled dedication. The Buckeye State supplied the third-highest total number of Union soldiers, surpassed only by New York and Pennsylvania. Yet perhaps even more remarkably, Ohio recorded the highest per capita military participation rate of any Union state.

Nearly sixty percent of Ohio's military-aged men—those between eighteen and forty-five years of age—served in the armed forces of the Union. Think about that. Six out of every ten eligible Ohio men answered the call to preserve the nation. Hundreds of Ohio infantry, cavalry, and artillery units marched into the crucible of war carrying the hopes of their communities and the future of the Republic upon their shoulders.

Ohio's contribution extended beyond numbers alone. More than five thousand African American Ohioans served in the United States Colored Troops, courageously fighting for the preservation of the Union and the cause of human freedom. Their service stands as a testament to the sacrifices made by countless Americans seeking a more perfect Union.

This state also produced some of the most influential military leaders in American history. Ohio was home to Ulysses S. Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Philip Henry Sheridan—commanders whose leadership helped secure Union victory and preserve the nation.

Although much of the conflict was fought far from Ohio's borders, the war touched this state directly. In 1863, Confederate General John Hunt Morgan led his cavalry force through southern and eastern Ohio during what became known as Morgan's Raid. This was the only significant Confederate military campaign within the state. The raid ended with the defeat and capture of Morgan's forces at the Battle of Salineville—the northernmost battle of the Civil War.

Ohio also played a significant role in housing Confederate prisoners of war. Camp Chase in Columbus and Johnson's Island in Sandusky Bay became well-known prison camps. Johnson's Island alone confined approximately fifteen thousand Confederate officers during the course of the war. .

One of the most remarkable examples of Ohio patriotism occurred in 1862 when Confederate forces threatened Cincinnati. Governor David Tod called upon civilians to help defend the city. Thousands of Ohio volunteers answered the call, arriving with their personal hunting rifles and shotguns. Known affectionately as the "Squirrel Hunters," these ordinary citizens built fortifications and stood ready to defend their homes and state from invasion. Their willingness to serve exemplified the determination of Ohio's people to preserve the Union. .

The cost of victory was immense. More than thirty-five thousand Ohioans died in service to their country. Thirty-five thousand fathers. Thirty-five thousand sons. Thirty-five thousand brothers. Their sacrifice helped secure the survival of the United States and the abolition of slavery.

The influence of Ohio's Civil War generation continued long after Appomattox. Five Union officers with Ohio ties would later become Presidents of the United States: Ulysses S. Grant; Rutherford B. Hayes; James A. Garfield; Benjamin Harrison; and William McKinley. Their leadership reflected the enduring impact Ohio veterans had on the nation they fought to preserve.

When the Grand Army of the Republic was formed after the war, Ohio veterans became some of its most devoted members and leaders. Across the state, G.A.R. Posts promoted patriotism, cared for veterans and their families, established Memorial Day traditions, and ensured that the sacrifices of the Union soldier would never be forgotten

The Grand Army of the Republic flourished throughout Ohio. Great Posts of veterans gathered in Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, Youngstown, Akron, Canton, and countless smaller communities across the Buckeye State.

By the early twentieth century, Cleveland alone maintained eight active G.A.R. Posts with nearly nine hundred members. In Cincinnati, Posts such as George H. Thomas Post No. 13, William H. Lytle Post No. 47, Israel Ludlow Post No. 76, and Fred C. Jones Post No. 401 became pillars of veteran activity. Dayton's Old Guard Post No. 23 became one of the state's most respected veteran organizations. And this city was home to influential Posts such as J.C. McCoy Post No. 1 and

Joshua W. Wells Post No. 451. Across Ohio, these Posts served not merely as meeting places, but as centers of patriotism, charity, remembrance, and civic leadership.

Brothers, Ohio holds a unique and honored place not only in the history of our nation and the Grand Army of the Republic, but also in the history of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. Throughout its history, the Department of Ohio has produced an extraordinary number of leaders who have guided our Order at the national level.

As I reflect upon my own journey of more than three decades in this Order, I am reminded of just how profound Ohio's influence has been. During my 30 years of service in the Sons of Union Veterans, I have had the privilege of serving under and learning from six Commanders-in-Chief from the Department of Ohio; Commander-in-Chief Bob Grim; Commander-in-Chief Don Darby; Commander-in-Chief "Young" Dave Medert; Commander-in-Chief Ken Freshley; Commander-in-Chief Don Martin; and Commander-in-Chief Pete Hritsko.

There were many more that served as Commander-in-Chief before I joined and were still serving the order with great dedication when I became active in 1996, like Past Commanders-in-Chief Gordon Bury, Chuck Corfman, and "Old" Dave Medert. Each brought his own considerable strengths, talents, and leadership style to our Order. Each helped shape the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War into the organization we know today. And each, in his own way, demonstrated the dedication, commitment, and patriotism that have long distinguished the Department of Ohio.

That record of leadership is not a coincidence. It is the product of generations of Brothers who have embraced service, preserved our history, and accepted the responsibility of leadership when called upon to do so.

Ohio's fingerprints can be found throughout the history of our Order. Its influence has been felt in our Camps, our Departments, our National Encampments, and in the continued growth and success of our Brotherhood. For that reason, Brothers, when I stand before the Department of Ohio today, I do so not only with admiration for your Civil War heritage, but with deep gratitude for your decades of leadership and service to the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War

Today, Brothers, we are the heirs of a sacred legacy. We cannot stand where our ancestors stood. We cannot march where they marched. We cannot know the full measure of what they endured. Yet, we can honor them through our actions. Every

Camp meeting. Every memorial service. Every grave decorated. Every historical program presented. Every young person taught about the Civil War. Each becomes part of the sacred trust they have passed to us.

The future of our Order does not rest solely in our traditions. It rests in our willingness to carry those traditions forward. The veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic did not preserve the Union merely for their own generation. They preserved it for all who would come after them. Likewise, we must ensure that the stories of courage, sacrifice, and national unity remain alive for future generations.

Today our nation continues to be defended by brave Americans serving around the globe. Though the battlefields are different, the spirit of service remains the same. The young men and women of our Armed Forces carry forward a tradition of duty that stretches from the soldiers of the Union Army to the service members of today

Therefore, let us keep them in our prayers. Let us pray for our soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, Guardians, and Coast Guardsmen serving in dangerous and hostile regions around the world. May God watch over them. May He protect them. May He strengthen their families. And may He return them safely to their homes and loved ones.

Brothers, this year our nation commemorates the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Two hundred and fifty years ago, our Founding Fathers proclaimed to the world that all men are created equal and that liberty is the birthright of every human being. The Declaration of Independence gave birth to the American Republic.

But nearly ninety years later, that Republic faced its greatest test. The nation founded in 1776 stood on the brink of destruction. The principles proclaimed in Philadelphia were challenged by rebellion, division, and civil war.

It was then that the Boys in Blue answered the call. They marched from farms, factories, towns, and cities—including hundreds of thousands from Ohio—to preserve the nation that the Declaration had created.

The Declaration of Independence founded the United States. The Union soldier preserved it. As Sons of Union Veterans, we are uniquely entrusted with telling both parts of that story. We must remind future generations that our freedom was first declared by the founders and later defended by the citizen soldiers who wore the blue.

In this season of America's Semiquincentennial, let us recommit ourselves to preserving that history. Let us tell the story of 1776. Let us tell the story of 1861. And let us ensure that future generations understand that the same nation born in Independence Hall was saved on the battlefields of the Civil War. For without the Declaration, there would have been no United States. And without the sacrifice of the Boys in Blue, there might not have been a United States to celebrate 250 years later.

Brothers, the Department of Ohio has much of which to be proud. Your dedication to preserving the memory of the Grand Army of the Republic and the Union soldier continues a noble tradition.

As we move forward together, let us remain steadfast in our purpose, faithful to our principles, and united in our mission. May we always remember that we are not merely students of history. We are its guardians.

Forward, Brothers, always forward! To the work of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Thank you.