

August 24, 2017

To Our Friends of Civil War Reenacting

As the elected Brigade Commander of the United States Volunteers (USV), the largest Union Civil War Reenacting Organization in the Country, I am compelled to clear the air of some of today's toxic smoke, not from civil war muskets, but from the voices and pens of a modern populace struggling with their perceptions of the Civil War, its monuments, and yes, our hobby of reenacting.

This is not the first time that the hot political issue of the day has touched the Reenacting community. We have been wrestling with the Confederate Flag controversy from time to time during my entire 25 years in this hobby. We have learned from those experiences that it is best to stay out of them, and allow whatever has sparked the debate to settle. The Confederate Battle Flag - the square version of the stars and bars - is historically correct at a Civil War Reenactment. Its symbolism as a military marker for a fighting army in the field can never be questioned.

Today's controversy, spurred by a senseless criminal act in Charlottesville Virginia, however transcends the traditional flag argument. Public ire now turns to a statue and monument to General Robert E. Lee, and if you believe the Governor of North Carolina, the Civil War itself. In response to the bronze statue of a Confederate Soldier being torn down and desecrated by a group of vandals in Durham, Governor Roy Cooper declared "*We cannot continue to glorify a war against the United States of America fought in the defense of slavery... These monuments should come down.*"

This past weekend, the City of Manassas and the Manassas Museum canceled their annual Civil War Living History Event "due to an abundance of caution for the public's safety." On the same weekend, a Confederate reenactor was pepper sprayed at the 128th Annual Soldiers Reunion Parade in Newton, North Carolina. We learned today that the perpetrator was a former school principal. He was duly arrested, and found carrying a firearm.

Closer to home, the New Philadelphia Times Reporter removed the Zoar Civil War event from its list of events on its Facebook Page after receiving what it considered were inappropriate responses. The paper immediately contacted the Zoar Community Association asking for a statement on what we were doing by way of security to address what might be a public protest or civil unrest. It published a

FRONT PAGE article on the subject in today's paper. Here is the link <http://www.timesreporter.com/news/20170822/precautions-being-taken-for-zoar-civil-war-reenactment>

We have since received calls from the Cleveland Plain Dealer and Canton Repository asking similar questions and we are expecting them to also run articles. And next week, I have been asked to appear at a morning talk show at the largest local AM radio station to discuss our event, and of course, I am sure, my views on the public debate.

So... my response to all of this. First, as to the Zoar Civil War Reenactment, **WE ARE NOT GOING TO CANCEL IT**. We have indeed met with local law enforcement, like we always do, and have worked out a security plan, not that dissimilar to what he have put in place at previous Civil War Events. We can deal with protesters, if any do show up, and the local police, sheriff and Homeland Security Agents will deal with any unruliness. I do not expect any in Zoar.

Second, we cannot get over all of the attention our Zoar event has drawn. The story of the Zoar Civil War Reenactment finds itself on the front page of the three largest metropolitan newspapers in North Eastern Ohio, serving a population of 4.5 million readers. This is free advertising just days before the event that we could never afford. While we are genuinely concerned that our event may attract individuals or groups with mischievous intentions, we are actually more apprehensive that the large influx of spectators that may overwhelm our parking and support amenities. Since ALL of the proceeds from this event are dedicated to Preservation efforts in Zoar Village, that is not necessarily a bad thing at all.

Third, and perhaps more importantly, is my response to the political debate, at least as it pertains to Civil War Reenactors and events. As we all know, Civil War Reenacting can trace its historical roots to the Civil War Veterans, Blue and Gray, that gathered at their annual reunions after the war. In addition to just reminiscing on the hardship, toils and glory of the battles they engaged in, these veterans got off their camp stools, formed a line, and went out to the fields to "refight" them for family and friends. Reenacting the Civil War was thus born.

At the 50th Anniversary event held at Gettysburg Pennsylvania in 1913, over 58,000 thousand Civil War Veterans attended. Nearly 9,000 of the participants were Confederate Veterans. The event was marked by repeated acts of Union and Confederate camaraderie. There were no signs of unpleasant differences, such as we saw at Charlottesville this past weekend. According to one chronicler, at the

Webb/Pickett Flag ceremony, two 1863 units advanced about 50 feet, Union from the North, Confederate from the South – to flags placed at the Stone Wall where they “clasped hands and buried their faces on each other’s shoulders.” On July 2, The Union Camp engaged in an impromptu “raid” on the Confederate side of the Great camp which “resulted in joint parades and camp fires following the charge”



The Webb/Pickett Flag Ceremony

President Woodrow Wilson’s Reunion Address summarized the spirit of the event, stating” *We have found one another again as brothers and comrades in arms, enemies no longer, generous friends rather, our battles long past, the quarrel forgotten-except that we shall not forget the splendid valor.*”

This sense of brotherhood between the men that fought this war was repeated at the 75th Gettysburg Reunion. The much smaller group of veterans now in their nineties once again proudly donned their blue and gray uniforms. Veterans from both armies again met at the Stone wall and shook each other’s hands. I think we can all remember that iconic picture. President Franklin Roosevelt’s sunset address to the men focused on healing and a united country and kicked off the unveiling of the *Eternal Light Peace Memorial* that still burns today.



Meeting at the Stone Wall at the 75th Gettysburg Reunion.

The USV is not making any public statements on the current affairs. We have long since decided that our organization will refrain from engaging in any formal public debate. However, if any of you are confronted by criticism or political discourse that questions your motives for participating in this great hobby, enlighten them on our roots. Remind them of the brave soldiers on both sides that actually fought this war, for they knew more than anyone why they did. And most importantly, leave them with the sanguine challenge that if these noble veterans, some who lost limbs and all who lost friends and comrades, could reach across a wall and shake hands with their former enemies in a spirit of brotherhood and healing, certainly, we can do the same today.

My sincerest regards,

Brig. General Darrell Markijohn
USV Brigade, Commanding