

**National Patriotic Instruction**  
**Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War**  
**May 2025**

**MEMORIAL DAY**

A decade ago, when I was Commander-in-Chief, I had the immense honor to deliver a Memorial Day speech at Arlington National Cemetery on May 30<sup>th</sup>. I was initially at a complete loss as to what to say. How could I come up with the words befitting such hallowed ground? How could I hope to convey the importance and solemnity of Memorial Day on such an occasion and at such a place as Arlington? I decided to look to what others had said on previous Memorial Days, and I started with the very first one. After reading it, I was in complete awe and knew that I needed to look no further. I extracted a portion of the speech and presented the following:

On May 30, 1868, a crowd of 5,000 gathered in the National Cemetery at Arlington for the first Decoration Day exercises. Before strewing flowers upon the graves of the dead, they listened to an address by future President James A. Garfield, then an Ohio congressman who had also served as a major general in the Civil War. This is a portion of his speech:



I am oppressed with a sense of the impropriety of uttering words on this occasion. If silence is ever golden, it must be here beside the graves of fifteen thousand men, whose lives were more significant than speech, and whose death was a poem, the music of which can never be sung. With words we make promises, plight faith, praise virtue. Promises may not be kept; plighted faith may be broken; and vaunted virtue be only the cunning mask of vice. We do not know one promise these men made, one pledge they gave, one word they spoke; but we do know they summed up and perfected, by one supreme act, the highest virtues of men and citizens. For love of country they accepted death, and thus resolved all doubts, and made immortal their patriotism and their virtue. For the noblest man that lives, there still remains a conflict. He must still withstand the assaults of time and fortune, must still be assailed with temptations, before which lofty natures have fallen; but with these the conflict ended, the victory was won, when death stamped on them the great seal of heroic character, and closed a record which years can never blot.

And now consider this silent assembly of the dead. What does it represent? Nay, rather, what does it not represent? It is an epitome of the war. Here are sheaves reaped in the harvest of death, from every battlefield of Virginia. If each grave had a voice to tell us what its silent tenant last saw and heard on earth, we might stand, with uncovered heads, and hear the whole story of the war. We should hear that one perished when the first great drops of the crimson shower began to fall, when the darkness of that first disaster at Manassas fell like an eclipse on the Nation; that another died of disease while wearily waiting for winter to end; that this one fell on the field, in sight of the spires of Richmond, little dreaming that the flag must be carried through three more years of blood before it should be planted in that citadel of treason; and that one fell when the tide of war had swept us back till the roar of rebel guns shook the dome of yonder Capitol, and re-echoed in the chambers of the Executive Mansion. We should hear mingled voices from the Rappahannock, the Rapidan, the Chickahominy, and the James; solemn voices from the Wilderness, and triumphant shouts from the Shenandoah, from Petersburg, and the Five Forks, mingled with the wild acclaim of victory and the sweet chorus of returning peace. The voices of these dead will forever fill the land like holy benedictions.

What other spot so fitting for their last resting place as this under the shadow of the Capitol saved by their valor? Here, where the grim edge of battle joined; here, where all the hope and fear and agony of their country centered; here let them rest, asleep on the Nation's heart, entombed in the Nation's love!

After I had delivered this speech, I sat back down among the other dignitaries. Sitting next to me was Sergeant Major Bryan Battaglia, then the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (SEAC). The position is the most senior non-commissioned officer (NCO) position overall in the United States Armed Forces. Battaglia thanked me for being there and complimented me on the moving words I had just spoken. I accepted the gratitude and reminded him that they had been delivered on that same hallowed ground 147 years earlier.

If the words of Congressman Garfield do not stir a sense of duty and patriotism in one's heart, then the SUVCW may not be the organization for them! Remember the Boys in Blue this Memorial Day and always!

In Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty,

Tad D. Campbell, PCinC  
National Patriotic Instructor