



Kevin P. Tucker
Commander-in-Chief
Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War

58 Forest Street
Wakefield, MA 01880
cinc@suvvw.org



Special Message #16
4 April 2026

Appomattox and Its Meaning: Guidance for Public Interpretation

Brothers,

In this, the **250th** year of our nation, as we commemorate the anniversary of General Robert E. Lee's surrender of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, it is incumbent upon us, as Brothers of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War further our mission of remembrance by clearly and faithfully conveying to the public the true significance of that event.

Lee's surrender was not merely the conclusion of a major military campaign—it was the effective end of organized armed rebellion against the United States. The surrender marked the beginning of the Confederacy's collapse, not in a single, simultaneous cessation of all fighting, as further battles, skirmishes, and naval engagements continued in various theaters for weeks thereafter. However, looking back, the surrender at Appomattox did mean a death knell for the Rebellion.

The surrender at Appomattox Court House secured the preservation of the Union, the triumph of constitutional government over insurrection, and was the beginning of a difficult but necessary process of national reconciliation. It affirmed that our republic, founded in liberty, could endure even the gravest internal trial.

Equally important, Appomattox must be understood in the broader context of what the war had come to represent by 1865. The Union victory ensured the destruction of slavery as an institution and validated the service and sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of soldiers who fought to uphold the nation. It signaled that the United States would remain one nation, indivisible, committed—however imperfectly—to the principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence.

When engaging with the public, I urge you to emphasize several key points:

1. **The preservation of the Union** — The central outcome of Appomattox was the survival of the United States as a single nation. This was the core objective for which Union soldiers fought and died.

2. **The rule of law over rebellion** — The surrender demonstrated that constitutional government cannot be set aside by force. The war settled, decisively, that disputes within our republic must be resolved through lawful means.
3. **The end of slavery as a war aim realized** — By 1865, Union victory and emancipation were inseparable. Appomattox represents the culmination of that transformation.
4. **Honor without distortion** — Reconciliation must never come at the expense of historical truth. While General Grant's terms were generous and intended to promote peace, we must avoid narratives that romanticize or obscure the cause of the rebellion. Slavery—especially its expansion and protection—was the fundamental cause, with political, economic, and constitutional conflicts flowing from that central issue.
5. **The beginning, not the end, of responsibility** — Appomattox opened the door to Reconstruction and the ongoing work of fulfilling the nation's founding ideals. That work continues today.

As heirs to the Grand Army of the Republic, we bear a solemn obligation: to ensure that the meaning of the Union victory is neither forgotten nor misrepresented. Our role is not only commemorative but educational. We must speak with clarity, grounded in historical fact, and with a steady commitment to the principles for which our forebears fought.

Let us approach this anniversary with both reverence and purpose.

In Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty,



Kevin P. Tucker
Commander-in-Chief
Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War