

REMARKS: HONEY SPRINGS MEMORIAL 2002

William B. Lees

As we gathered here last year at this time, none of us could have conceived of the attack on our country that occurred a slight two months later. As the media attempted to come to grips with the magnitude of our loss on September 11, comparisons were quickly drawn to the Civil War and the Battle of Antietam. Antietam, whose 140th anniversary is this year, remains, fortunately, our nation's bloodiest day.

Similarities to the Civil War also arose as we watched the small bedroom communities in New York and New Jersey await word of their losses. These communities were tied to the World Trade center much like the communities that were tied to the locally recruited regiments of the Civil War. During the Civil War, communities followed the movements of their regiments. After every major battle in which they were engaged, they waited for the postings of casualties. We watched this same process in the days following September 11.

But attempts to draw closer parallels between September 11 and the Civil War and indeed all other American conflicts are doomed to fail: the

terrorism of the last several decades, and our response to it, is inherently different.

Let us remember today that the Civil War was the threshold that we as a people had to cross in order to fulfill the destiny that was envisioned by our nation's founders. The sacrifice by Americans from the North and the South that we memorialize today was the price that we paid to become a great nation.

The Civil War did divide us, to be sure, and vestiges of this division remain as part of our regional cultures to this day. But after the Civil War, we emerged as a great and strong and powerful nation. This greatness ultimately drew us into world-wide conflicts in 1917 and again in 1941. Each of these tragedies caused more sacrifice, but each served in their own way to heal the divisions of the Civil War as soldiers from both the north and the south marched off to fight a common foe.

Symbolic of this healing was the 1917 annual reunion of the Sons of Confederate Veterans—the first to be held outside of the south. Scores of aging Confederate veterans marched through the streets of Washington DC

in support of our war effort. Later, during World War II, the citizens of Vicksburg, showing support for our nation's war efforts, began to celebrate Independence Day for the first time since July 4, 1863, when the Confederate defenders of that town surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant.

Thus the Civil War has direct and everlasting relevance for us today, and that is why we as a nation hold on to the memory of this conflict so tightly and reverently. Because of the national framework that our founders created and that was forged into a national foundation by the sacrifices of the Civil War, the attack of September 11 saddened us, shocked us, cost us, but did not destroy us.

Let us today remember the sacrifices of July 17, 1863, and never forget why they are important for us today. In the process, let us also thank those who come together every year to remember Honey Springs, those who on a national basis support a continuing movement to preserve places where the Civil War was fought, and those who work to keep the memory alive and to educate us on this important part of our history.

Here at Honey Springs I would like to recognize the efforts during this past year of our staff, Ralph Jones, Howard Mckinnis, and Arnold Perkins, who have made great strides in putting the finishing touches on a vision of the Honey Springs Battlefield that was first kindled during the centennial of this battle almost 40 years ago. This memorial service also marks the completion of the interpretive trails system on the battlefield.

Thank you all for coming out today to remember what happened here 139 years ago. I hope that you will all joins us in September when we will once again reenact the battle of Honey Springs.