

Protecting War Memorials

Prepared comments by Colonel Greg Eanes¹
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History is not a weapon to be wielded in the pursuit of vengeance. It is a tool that is to be used to build a better future. Our American military history and monuments to our dead are often placed at risk of destruction and misinterpretation. The Sutherlin Mansion Confederate war memorial is just one of the latest. The Confederate soldier is an American soldier, so recognized by multiple Congresses, multiple Presidents and more importantly, by Union Army veterans. A Union soldier at Appomattox speaking to one of Robert E. Lee's soldiers said, *"If I were you, I would be the proudest man in the world."* Such was the esteem held for the Confederate soldier by his Union counterpart.

Most American veterans feel the disturbance of any war memorial is disrespectful and harmful to the memory of those patriots who served their states and nation in times of war and peace. Fortunately Virginia has protections in state law.² That law serves a purpose: to ensure the preservation of all Virginia's war memorials from the ever-changing winds of political correctness and fickle emotions of the 'body politic'. It is designed to place a check on irrational, emotion driven decision making. As recent events have illustrated, the law works as intended.

Virginia's law is a role model for the nation. It is so well-crafted that in 2012 the American Veterans (AMVETS) - one of the 'big four' of veteran groups -- asked Congress to pass Federal legislation modeled on Virginia's State Code.³ The same year the Sons of Spanish-American War Veterans also asked Congress to codify these same protections. VFW and American Legion Posts in Virginia have passed similar resolutions and all Virginia's Veterans groups support Virginia's law.

Threats to Confederate war memorials cannot be viewed in isolation. What happens to Confederate monuments has implications for all other American war memorials and the veterans they honor. Let me be clear: this is not just a 'Confederate' heritage issue; it is a 'veterans' issue; one that concerns nearly one million Virginia veterans and 25 million American veterans. Many political activists - some of whom came of age and protested American soldiers during the Vietnam era -- view with disdain anything military, including memorials they mistakenly see as a glorification of war.

What our critics fail to understand is that we veterans do not glorify war. We do celebrate the lives of American men and women who were willing to give up to their last full measure

¹ The prepared comments were made after public recognition of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion and Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW) who were present. Also present were Marine Corps League representatives.

² Virginia State Code, Section 15.2-1812, *Memorials for War Veterans*

³ Virginia's *Memorials for War Veterans* in concert with HR290, the *War Memorial Protection Act*.

of devotion to defend their homes and the concepts of American liberty as they understood it to be. And this most certainly includes the Confederate soldier.

Allow me to cite a few of these threats to non-Civil War memorials and the truthful interpretations of our military history:⁴

- In 1994, the Smithsonian Institute was able to obtain the *Enola Gay*, the aircraft that dropped the first atomic bomb ending World War II. The original left wing educational interpretation portrayed the Japanese as ‘the victims’ and the Americans as ‘the aggressors’ in a race war. It highlighted the loss of Japanese lives lost and minimized the potential loss of American lives had the United States been forced to invade Japan. Fortunately many World War II veterans were still alive and after a long fight got the museum director fired and ensured a balanced interpretation of events was presented to the American public. Imagine if this had happened 50 years later when the participants of World War II were dead. Who would have defended their honor and good name? I like to think that we non-World War II veterans would have leapt to meet the challenge;⁵
- In 2014, the city of King, North Carolina was sued because of a donated war memorial. The memorial was in remembrance of soldiers from all wars and the memorial looked like a typical G.I. in Vietnam. It contained a soldier kneeling at a grave. At the grave was a cross - like one would normally find in a cemetery. The city did not want to face the expenses of a long court battle and chose to surrender. They dismantled the monument;
- Currently, the secular humanists want to tear down the Bladensburg, Maryland World War I Veterans Memorial. Erected in 1925 and also known as the War Mothers memorial, it contains the names of men who lost their lives in the Great War for Democracy. It too is in the shape of a cross and sits on a small strip of public land. The people filing suit want to either “demolish” the memorial or deface it by cutting off the arms of the cross to make it a “slab”. The American Legion is fighting this effort and is being defended by the Liberty Institute whose spokesman said, “*We ’ll continue to defend this veteran’s memorial to see that it stands for another hundred years. The men it honors, others who have served, and those in uniform today deserve no less.*”
- The Waikiki Natatorium War Memorial to World War I veterans is also under threat. Built in 1927, it has been designated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of the eleven most endangered historic sites in the United States and in 2014 as a ‘*national treasure*’ - meaning it is irreplaceable -- yet the last two Mayors have vowed to tear it down for economic development purposes;

Two recent cases have been precedent setting. Both have established a pattern for transferring the public lands where these memorials sit to suitable private non-profits so these me-

⁴ This list is just a sampling. At least two Vietnam War memorials have been vandalized in California but these were criminal acts and not government acts.

⁵ The Air Force Association has a very detailed report on the *Enola Gay* issue available on its website. <http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/EnolaGayArchive/Pages/default.aspx>

monuments can be retained in place and cared for at private expense rather than taxpayer expense.

- The Mount Soledad Veterans Memorial Cross in San Diego was dedicated to Korean War veterans in 1954. In 1989 a group sued for the memorial's removal because it displayed a Christian cross. After 25 years of state and Federal litigation at tremendous expense to taxpayers, Congressional action authorized the transfer of the war memorial and the land to a private non-profit known as the Mount Soledad Memorial Association;
- The other case is the Mojave War Memorial in Cima, California. Dedicated to World War I veterans it too contained a cross. It too was subject to repeated vandalism and destruction. It took Congressional action to enable the government to transfer the land in April 2012 to a local VFW post. This was after a legal challenge that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.⁶

Individuals that object to war monuments on public property often cite their 'taxes' are helping to maintain the monument. That's a fair observation. And it is an argument we've heard about Confederate monuments throughout the South. But another fair observation is that many people who want to see these Confederate monuments preserved and protected on public property are also taxpayers. They too are stakeholders with valid opinions and the tax dollars that support them. They too reflect the sentiment of President Theodore Roosevelt who said:

. as a reunited people we have the right to feel the same pride in the valor of the man who conscientiously risked his life in the Confederate uniform that we have in the man who fought in the blue."

With that in mind, the transfer of war monuments and the land they sit on to private non-profits appears to be a reasonable compromise in certain cases. The small monument that sits on these grounds proudly under the Third National Flag of the Confederacy is a war memorial as is the entire Sutherlin Memorial Mansion. The public record is clear in this regard.

Those who want to deface the smaller monument by pulling down the Third National Confederate flag are asking City Council to break established state law.

They are asking City Council to violate a lawful contract with the Heritage Preservation Association which specifically spelled out this monument would include the Third National Confederate flag.

They are asking City Council to become the first town in America to engage in ethnocide; the deliberate and systematic destruction of the culture of an ethnic group.⁷ The descend-

⁶ Salazar v. Buono, 28 April 2010.

⁷ 'Ethnic Group' is defined as "a community or population made up of people who share a common cultural background or descent". Ethnocide is a very strong word but is reflective of those who view as an outrage the current unrestrained attacks and lashing out on things 'Confederate' by politicians, national media and a vocal and active political element. It is used here to drive home a perspective of those of Confederate ancestry.

ants of Confederate veterans share a common cultural background. That makes them an 'ethnic group'.

Any attempt to deface the monument will result in a court battle which will be long, drawn out, and needlessly waste the taxpayer dollars of Danville's citizens; dollars that could be spent on more pressing issues. The Mount Soledad and Mojave War Memorial cases illustrate the long term costs and *the resolve* of veterans to protect memorials to our dead.

Danville's City Council can learn from other's experience. It can transfer the property to a private non-profit that will honor the mission of the original donors, the Danville Confederate Memorial Association and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Besides good political sense, it makes solid business sense.

The Danville Museum of Fine Arts had a revenue shortfall of \$612,313 between 2008 and 2013. That's an average of around \$100,000 a year. An architectural and engineering inspection recently revealed there are several thousand dollars in maintenance and upgrades needed.^{8 9} The building and grounds could cost taxpayers over a million or more dollars in the next ten years. Danville City Council has been offered up to one-half million dollars for the Sutherlin Mansion and grounds. By taking the money and transferring the property, the city would save themselves one million dollars over ten years and come out one-half million dollars ahead in cash, a positive budget impact of \$1.5 million or more.¹⁰ That's money that could be allocated to higher city priorities. Transferring the property *is* a viable remedy for Danville. It's good business sense.

And this brings me to some final educational points regarding Danville's dilemma:

- First we must understand that there are people of goodwill on both sides of the discussion with a firm commitment to traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs. Our spiritual teachings allow us to treat each other with decency and mutual respect even when we disagree. We in the Confederate heritage and veteran community do what we do out of love. Love of God, love of country, love of our constitution and love of family. We are motivated by love. Our responses to city affronts will always be lawful and non-violent.
- Second, the Confederate heritage community has uniformly and routinely condemned hate groups who have abused the Confederate flag. This is a matter of public record. Unfortunately, the heritage groups could not trademark the Confederate battle flag to prevent its use by hate groups any more than the U.S. flag can be trademarked. For the Confederate heritage community to abandon the Confederate flag means 'surrender' to either the Klan or to a hateful liberal agenda of cultural cleansing. Let

⁸ IRS Form 990s for the Danville Museum of Fine Arts reports revenue shortfalls for the most recent filing years. In 2008 filing year, \$40,543 loss; in 2009, a \$123,936 loss; in 2010, \$82,012; in 2011, \$140,026; in 2012, \$101,314 and in 2013, \$124,482; In a 8 July letter to the *Danville Register and Bee* Councilman Fred Shanks said the City of Danville spent an average of nearly \$100,000 a year on routine maintenance, special maintenance and utilities for Sutherlin.

⁹ The estimate identified large scale improvements and smaller improvements for a total of around \$1 million in needed improvements. This information was obtained after the speech was delivered.

¹⁰ When coupled with the long and short term structural and maintenance improvements, the actual city savings could be about \$2.5 million.

me make this clear: the Confederate heritage community will never surrender its flags to hate groups;

- Third, hate groups are vermin. Hateful people victimized people of color during the Civil Rights era. Some of those victims are still angry and bitter. They have a right to their anger. But that anger is misdirected when it is aimed at monuments to our Confederate dead. The victims of 1960s hate are under the mistaken impression that by tearing down our war memorials, they are wreaking vengeance for wrongs committed in the Civil Rights era. We are sensitive to their pain. But two ‘wrongs’ do not make a ‘right’. We also caution that their anger and desire for vengeance makes them imitators of those who originally caused their pain. I urge all citizens to remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King:

“Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man’s sense of values and his objectivity.”

I say to them: Do not become what you claim to despise.

- Fourth, there is much in our free society that is offensive. The most offensive thing I can recall is the work of a so-called artist entitled ‘Immersion (Piss Christ)’ - a photograph of a Christian crucifix in a jar of urine. The artist received \$20,000 Federal tax dollars to create it. It was displayed in a federally funded museum. Not only was it offensive and paid for with our tax dollars; it was hurtful to those of Christian faith. My point is this: In our free society, ‘hurtful’ is not justification to remove from public view things one may deem offensive. As honest Americans in our free and open society we have to exercise tolerance. Tolerance, like prejudice, is a two-way street;
- Finally, Dr. King dreamed of a ‘table of brotherhood’ that is open to all persons, specifically citing the sons of former slaves and former slave owners. Dr. King died working for that dream. Members of the Confederate heritage community share Dr. King’s dream. We are very much a part of that ‘table of brotherhood’. To those who oppose this war memorial to our dead, I reach out and say, ‘break bread with us’. Pray with us. Spend time with us. Judge us by the content of our character. Understand that the positive aspects of our Confederate military heritage are very much a part of us; it is in our blood; it is our family. We would not reject it any more than honest Christians would reject our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And we will exercise all lawful and peaceful options to protect the rights and privileges of citizenship that we too are entitled to enjoy as American citizens. We are very much a part of our country’s multi-cultural fabric. We’re not going away. Understand it and accept it. You’ll find that if the Confederate heritage community is treated with tolerance and mutual respect, you’ll have natural allies on issues of joint concern such as education and jobs.

In summary, all of our war memorials are sacred to the memories of the American men and women who served, fought and died. If public entities no longer wish to care for them, then we in the veteran and military heritage communities are prepared to step up to fill that void. But it is a sad day in the history of our country when the public at large refuses to honor those citizens who have risen to defend it. What message does disrespect of our war dead

and their memorials send to our youth who will be entrusted with protecting our freedoms in future conflicts? Is this

how we want to be remembered? That is not a course for honorable people. Let's honor our military heritage proudly and teach our children to honor our heroes and emulate their example.

I leave you with these words by President Theodore Roosevelt, who in 1905 said of the nation's Confederate veterans:

"They by their deeds reflect credit upon their descendants and upon all Americans, both because they did their duty in war and because they did their duty in peace."¹¹

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¹¹ President Theodore Roosevelt comments, Raleigh, North Carolina, 19 October 1905.