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Sons Of Confederate Veterans Starts Union Camp

Posted 2006-08-21

Goal Is To Honor Ancestors On Both Sides Of the Civil War

By [Jeff Mellott](#)

LURAY — Members of the Summers-Koontz Camp No. 490 of the Sons of Confederate Veterans gathered around the American Flag at a restaurant here last week. They put their left hand on the Bible and their right hand touched the flag as they recited the obligation or oath that officially made them members of the new Luray-Carlisle Reunion Camp No. 1881, Sons of Union Veterans.

The act was an acknowledgement of their ancestors who fought in blue and gray, the new members said.

"Why not?" asked Robert Moore, commander of both the Confederate and Union camps. "Why can't Confederate and Union descendants come together?" he asked.

Historic Roots

The name of the new Union camp commemorates a meeting of former Confederates and former federal soldiers in 1881.

In that year, members of the Grand Army of the Republic, a Civil War Union veterans group at Carlisle, Pa., traveled to the caverns at Luray. They sent notice ahead and Confederate veterans feted them with speeches and a banquet.

The Union veterans returned the favor. They raised funds so the Confederate veterans could travel to Pennsylvania for a similar celebration.

One of the former Confederates who served on the committee that welcomed the Union veterans was Samuel Judd of the 10th Va. Infantry. Judd is one of Donnie Seal's ancestors. Seal, 37, of Luray, was among the eight Confederate camp members who pledged to honor the Union camp's obligation, including monument restoration projects and observance of Memorial Day on May 30.

Seal, who works in maintenance for VF Jeanswear in Luray, said it was appropriate that he follow the example of his ancestor.

"They were the ones actually shooting at each other," he said. "If they could get along, why can't I."

Allies

The mention of members of a Sons of Confederate Veterans camp wanting to charter a Union camp raised questions, said James Hanby, past commander of the Maryland Department of the Sons of Union Veterans that includes Virginia. But they approved the charter.

It is not unusual for members of both camps to have a dual ancestry, said Hanby, who is descended from veterans from both sides of the Civil War.

But the Summers-Koontz camp's action makes the new Union camp one of a kind, he said.

National Sons of Confederate Veterans Executive Director Ben Sewell said the SCV has no problems with what the members of the Summers-Koontz camp have done.

In the Sons of Confederate Veterans' pursuit of promoting true history, Sewell said the Sons of Union Veterans have been a good ally battling revisionists and political correctness.

But Sewell has no doubts that some in the Sons of Confederate Veterans will have difficulty with what some of the members of the Summers-Koontz camp have done.

Members of the Summers-Koontz camp expect some criticism.

"I don't think there is anything wrong with you if you have a Confederate flag on your license plate," Seal said. "I don't believe you are being a traitor to Southern heritage if you stand up for the Pledge of Allegiance."

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The Union camp grew out of a challenge by one of the Confederate camp members, Moore said.

The member told Moore, an avid researcher and historian, that he would not be able to find any Union ancestors in his family tree.

Moore found two.

Moore was already aware of his own "dual ancestry." But the discovery of the two other ancestors for the member of the Confederate Sons started Moore climbing the family trees of other Confederate camp members. He found other members had a joint heritage.

"We didn't form this group to agitate," Moore, of Swoope, said. "When I have dual ancestors like this," he said, "I can look at history a lot more objectively."

Seal is proud of all of his ancestors, who as far as he knew, fought honorably during the war. "I don't see how you are dishonoring the one by remembering the others," he said.

The formation of the Union camp by the members of the Confederate camp, said Gregory Kelly, 40, of Luray, will help promote understanding.

"Many people see us as rednecks because we are in SCV," Kelly said. "This shows we are not that way at all."

Kelly, manager of the Food Lion in Stanley, said the members will likely be ostracized by many people because of the creation of the Union camp.

"[But] if it will help in any kind of way to bring issues to rest," he said, "that is great."

More Information

Information about the Sons of Union Veterans Camp 1881 can be found at <http://www.geocities.com/summerskoontz490scv/Camp1881SUVCWHomePage.html>

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August 27, 2006 1:22 AM

I think that it truely speaks to the integrity of the men who are involved in this camp, to honor ancestors on both sides of a controversial conflict. It only goes to show that such camps like the SCV and SUV truely are about honoring the service and sacrifices made by their ancestors and do not exist to serve any other malevolent purpose.

Kelli Ponn
Stanley

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