

HEADQUARTERS GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC,
No. 411 F STREET,
Washington, D. C., June 2, 1869.

It seems proper, in view of the many misrepresentations and comments made by a portion of the press, here and elsewhere, in relation to the action at Arlington to prevent any demonstration over the graves of the rebel dead buried there, that some statement should be made with the view of indicating the motives and purposes of the Grand Army of the Republic in relation to the memorial services over the graves of those who died that the republic might live.

The committee in charge of the ceremonies at Arlington directed the placing of a guard over the graves of the rebel soldiers buried there, with the view of informing those who, supposing that Union soldiers lay beneath, might ignorantly place on them their floral offerings, and also to prevent any such unseemly act as the designed decoration of those graves, to effect which, it is well known, there was a purpose on the part of persons whose every sympathy was, and still remains, with the "Lost Cause."

It is believed that the charges against the Marines on guard, which originally appeared in the Sunday Herald, of this city, are wilful exaggerations. The guard received their instructions from the committee, and it is believed that they discharged their duty in a proper manner and spirit.

We, however, address ourselves briefly to a statement of the design had in arranging this Memorial Day and its beautiful ceremonies.

The Grand Army of the Republic seeks to honor and preserve the principles and institutions for which its members and their dead comrades fought. To keep green the memory of the latter is to make stronger the devotion of those who survive. Hence the institution of "Memorial Day." Hence, too, the necessity of confining it strictly to the one holy purpose indicated, that of honoring the men who died that the nation might live, and of thereby reviving in our hearts, and of those who are to come after us, the lofty devotion to freedom and republican nationality which marked the republic's grand army of the dead. Is such an act incompatible with the noblest idea of magnanimity? We know it is not. We strew flowers therefore on the graves of our comrades, and prevent their being strewn in the national cemeteries at the same time on the graves of such rebel dead as may be buried therein, not because we cherish any feelings of hate or desire to triumph over individual foes, but because we seek to mark in this distinction and manner the feelings with which the nation regards freedom and slavery, loyalty and treason, republican principles and those of a slaveholding oligarchy. We are ready to forgive, we hold no malice, but we will never consent by public national tribute to obliterate the wide gulf which lies between the objects, motives, and principles for which we fought and our comrades died, and those for which the rebel armies banded together, and for which their dead now lie in numerous graves. They were brave, and we know it; none can better appreciate that fact than those who fought against them. But mere courage never ennobled treason. It cannot turn slavery into liberty, nor make despotic intentions desirable and to be applauded as virtues. Our refusal to decorate rebel graves marks no hatred of their occupants or friends, but our undying hostility to the ideas for which they fought and died. To do less than keep this distinction fresh in the national mind is to undermine the republic itself.

WM. T. COLLINS,
Adjutant General G. A. R.