

important day that was—perhaps one of the most important single days of the entire war. For the one day gave General Grant the time he needed to reinforce his defenses of Washington and thus save the capital from capture and destruction. Later in writing his memoirs, this is how General Grant himself assessed the significance of the Battle of Monocacy:

“They (meaning the Union forces),” General Grant wrote, “met the enemy, and, as might have been expected, were defeated; but they succeeded in stopping him for the day on which the battle took place. . . .

“There is no telling how much this result (Early’s retreat from Washington) was contributed to by General Lew Wallace’s leading what might well be considered almost a forlorn hope. If Early had been but one day earlier he might have entered the capital before the arrival of the reinforcements I had sent.”

And then General Grant added:

“Whether the delay caused by the battle amounted to a day or not, General Wallace contributed on this occasion, by the defeat of the troops under him, a greater benefit to the cause than often falls to the lot of a commander of an equal force to render by means of a victory.”

If we judge the Battle of Monocacy, then, not by its immediate results but by its ultimate consequences, as indeed we must in a fair and accurate judgment of history, we see that it was not, as it is sometimes treated, a relatively *minor engagement* of the Civil War, but was, instead, one of the really decisive battles of that war. And today, as we look back upon the terrible, tragic events of this war in which Americans fought Americans, we should dismiss from our minds the immediate results and consider only the broad consequences of that struggle. Whatever our ancestry or our heritage, we must not adjudge a battle, or a campaign, or the war itself, in terms of immediate victory or defeat. For as bloody and as costly and as devastating as the war was, its ultimate consequence was a stronger and more united nation.

Whatever their ancestry or their heritage, Americans, as a result of this war, no longer question that their highest obligation is to their central government—that the integrity of the Union must be preserved above all else. We know, as a result of this war, that whatever our feelings may be toward individual acts of our central government, we have no right to take up arms or to use force to resist them. That is an important lesson—a lesson we must not forget.