General Order’s No. 9: Ending the war peacefully
(GLC00526.01)
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Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House on the afternoon of 9 April 1865. Grant considered the war to be over and allowed the former Confederates to return to their homes rather than becoming prisoners of war. He also authorized rations to feed Lee’s starving army and ordered joyous Union troops to cease firing salutes and to refrain from cheering. 28,365 officers and men of the Confederate Army were paroled according to the terms of surrender.

On the night of April 9th, Lee asked his aide-de-camp, Charles Marshall, to draft a message to the troops. Lee edited the draft, making a few minor changes and striking out a paragraph, which he felt would keep alive the current hostilities between the North and South, and issued the order on April 10th to commanding officers. The document presented here is from a second group made out by Charles Marshall for distribution.

Lee hoped his general order would help ease the South’s humiliation and sense of loss that came with the surrender. His men loved and respected him and would have followed him to certain death. General Order No. 9 showed his men that he cared too much to sacrifice them to a lost cause. It did not occur to Lee that, due to the terms of surrender, he was without an army and had no right to issue a military order. General Orders No. 9 is undeniably one of the most famous documents written during the Civil War and perhaps the most famous military order in history.
Head Quarters A N V

April 11th 1865

{General Order}
{       No 9        }

After four years of arduous service marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources.

I need not tel [sic] the brave survivors of so many hard fought battles who have remained steadfast to the last that I have consented to the result from no distrust of them.

But feeling that valor and devotion could accomplish nothing that would compensate for the loss that must have attended the continuance of the contest I determined to avoid the useless sacrifice of those whose past services have endeared them to their countrymen,

By [them] terms of the agreement Officers and Men can return to their homes and remain until exchanged. You will take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed, And I earnestly pray that a merciful God will extend to you his blessing and protection

With unceasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous consideration for myself I bid you an affectionate farewell,

R E Lee
Genl

[docket]
Genrl R E Lees
farewell orders
to the Army of N. V.a
& other papers
After four years of arduous service, marked by unexampled courage and fortitude, the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources. I need not add the brave comrades of so many brave fought battles who have remained steadfast to the last that I have encountered in the result of the defeat of them.

But feeling that valor and devotion could accomplish nothing that would compensate for the loss that must have attended the continuance of the contest, I determined to avoid the useless sacrifice of those whose past services have insured them to their countrymen.

By the terms of the agreement, Officers and men now return to their homes and remain until exchanged. You will take unto you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed, and I earnestly pray that a merciful God will vouchsafe to you his blessing and protection.

With an unceasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country and a grateful remembrance of your labors and generous consideration for myself I bid you an affectionate farewell.

[Signature]