



## **STATEMENT OF THE NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION, SONS OF CONFEDERATE VETERANS**

Since the placement of the General Nathan Bedford Forrest Memorial Flag Site in Burke County, the Morganton News Herald has insisted on tarnishing the legacy of General Forrest and along with it, the reputation of the North Carolina Division, Sons of Confederate Veterans.

It is wholly incorrect for the News Herald to state that General Forrest was a “former KKK leader” or a “Ku Klux Klan leader”. Their statement of falsehood as fact implies that the North Carolina Division, Sons of Confederate Veterans is honoring a Klan leader. This is completely false.

The defamatory rumor that General Forrest was in any way involved with the early iterations of “the Klan” (as it is now widely known) first appeared in the years following the War Between the States. As is well established, the Klan was not a singular organization, but rather, the public’s conception of a number of different organizations dedicated to racial violence and Democratic-party rule in the years following the War Between the States. There were several such societies and organizations across the South during the days of reconstruction, however, the Klan that is most often referenced began in Pulaski, Tennessee in late 1865 and was called the “Kuklos.” What the public now thinks of as the Klan, was actually a consolidated and re-organized version of these various groups, named the Ku Klux Klan, that appeared around 1915 and had chapters and supporters North and South. This Klan used the American flag as its symbol and not the Confederate flag.

One of the most persistent and false rumors is the claim that General Forrest was elected “Grand Wizard” of the Klan in 1867. As it turns out, he was not even present at this particular meeting, and while elected in absentia, never served or agreed to serve in any such capacity. There is some evidence to suggest that the nomination and election was intended as a Klan sneer at his progressive post-war statements on race relations in the South.

General Forrest was called before a Congressional committee in 1871, and for four hours, under oath, gave testimony confirming that he was not and had not been a part of the Klan. In his own words, when asked about the Klan, General Forrest stated: “It was a matter I knew very little about. All my efforts were addressed to stop it, disband it, and prevent it...I was trying to keep it down as much as possible.” Further, he added: “I talked with different people that I believed were connected to it, and urged the disbandment of it, that it should be broken up.” This is all part of the congressional record of the United States and can be easily confirmed. During those same proceedings, the only evidence presented by members of Congress to corroborate General Forrest’s connection with the Klan was an article from a Cincinnati newspaper.

While there is plenty of documentary evidence to refute what the Morganton News Herald states as fact, there is far less evidence to support its conclusions. In reality, General Forrest was a brilliant military leader, and after his service to the Confederate States of America, a model citizen of the re-

United States. His efforts after the War included reconciliation with the Northern states and several public statements supporting the equality and success of African-Americans. This was done with courage and at the expense of General Forrest's image among some of his contemporaries.

As a testament to his feeling, he addressed the Independent Order of Pole Bearers in Memphis in 1875, saying: "I came here with the jeers of some white people, who think that I am doing wrong. I believe I can exert some influence and do much to assist the people in strengthening fraternal relations and shall do all in my power to elevate every man, to depress none." He also said: "Many things have been said about me that are wrong, and which black and white persons here who stood by me through the war can contradict...I feel that you are free men, I am a free man, and we can do as we please. I came here as a friend and whenever I can serve any of you I will do so. We have one union, one flag, one country; therefore, let us stand together. Although we differ in color, we should not differ in sentiment."

Vilifying General Forrest is wrong. He is worthy of our praise and led our ancestors by example through four terrible years of War against an oppressive federal government. When that struggle was over, he made it his life's work to be a good citizen of the reunited nation and to embrace all of those who shared his values. We encourage the Morganton News Herald to retract its former statement and acknowledge that there is far more to the story than their previous coverage would indicate.

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