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"Black Jack" Logan ...

LEGENDARY SPARK FOR MEMORIAL DAY

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The descriptive "Black Jack" appellation has been a nickname for more than one American military leader, generally in a complimentary sense. One who received the sobriquet was General John A. Logan, primary founder of Memorial Day in 1868, who, in the period of the Civil War, was characterized as "adept at military maneuvers as in parliamentary tactics."

"Logan was an unusual soldier," wrote Bruce Catton in his Mainstream of America series, *This Hallowed Ground*. He is described as a swarthy man with a shock of black hair, long drooping mustachios-and a very special ability to lead his men on the battlefield, a strange contrast when his seeming lack of military background is considered. In combat his men chanted "Black Jack, Black Jack" in swelling volume as they charged the lines willingly and cheerfully on the orders of a "political appointee."

John Alexander Logan, eldest of 11 children of a peripatetic physician from Northern Ireland, who came to the United States via Maryland, Missouri, and Jackson County, Illinois, was born in 1826 and died in 1886-two years after he had received a highly complimentary vote for president on the first ballot the Republican National Convention in Chicago. Subsequently, James G. Blaine, a former Secretary of State under President and Sir Knight Garfield and President Arthur and scheduled to occupy the same secretarial post under Benjamin Harrison at a later date, was nominated for president. Logan accepted the post of vice president and "campaigning vigorously," even though he realized, correctly, it was in a lost cause.

Blaine, when he received the news of Logan's death in 1886, said: "General Logan was a man of immense force in a legislative body. His will was unbending, his courage, both moral and physical, was of the highest order. I never knew a more fearless man. He did not quail before public opinion when he had once made up his mind more than he did before the guns ... when he headed a charge of his enthusiastic troops."

Masonically he was Raised in Mitchell Lodge No. 85, Illinois, in 1851, exalted in Washington Chapter No. 43, RAM., and Knighted in Chevalier Bayard Commandery No. 52, Chicago, after the war. He was nominated to receive the degree of Honorary Sovereign Grand Inspector General, 33^o, Northern Masonic Jurisdiction, in September of 1886, but died December 26 before the honor could be conferred.

John Logan had what was described as a "broken education," including common schooling, some tutoring and brief attendance at Shiloh College. When he returned from service in the 1st Illinois Infantry as a lieutenant after the 1846-48 Mexican War, in which he received little or no combat experience, he was elected Clerk of the County Court and decided he would pursue a career as a lawyer. He resigned his post and began studies at Louisville University, then continued the study of law with his uncle, Lieutenant-Governor Alexander M. Jenkins, in Jackson County. He was admitted to the bar and became his uncle's partner.

Reports of the era say that John Logan's "forcible style of oratory, pleasing address and fine voice" won his election to the state legislature in 1852 and again for three successive terms. His happy choice of a wife in 1853 was Mary Simerson Cunningham, a "gracious and charming" lady who aided her husband's career. He resumed his practice of law, this time in Benton, Franklin County, Illinois, and was a presidential-elect in 1856 on the Buchanan-Breckinridge ticket.

The Buchanan-Breckinridge ticket won, and Logan was also elected to Congress from Illinois as a Douglas Democrat. In the 1860 election he wholeheartedly supported Stephen A. Douglas. It was the consensus of some that he strongly sympathized with the South, but, when Abraham Lincoln was elected, he declared he would "shoulder his musket to have him inaugurated."

And he did exactly that. In July of 1861, he left his seat in Congress, joined the ranks of soldiers marching out of Washington, and fought in the initial Battle of Bull Run. Reports say "Logan was the last to leave the field." He returned to Illinois, resigned from Congress, organized the 31st Illinois Infantry, and was appointed Colonel. He was in action by November, led a successful bayonet charge, and had his horse shot from under him. At Fort Henry he distinguished himself, then later at Fort Donelson, "while gallantly leading the assault," he was wounded and put out of action briefly.

In 1862 he reported to General Grant at Pittsburg Landing as Brigadier General of Volunteers. He saw continuous action, advanced to Major General and Commander of the Army of Tennessee, and served as one of President Lincoln's successful "political generals." Illinois constituents urged him to be an 1862 candidate again for Congress, and his response is quotable: "I have entered the field to die, if need be, for the government, and never expect to return to peaceful pursuits until the object of this war of preservation has become a fact established."

After the war President and Sir Knight Andrew Johnson offered Logan appointment as Ambassador to Mexico but he declined. He was elected to the 40th, 41st and 42nd Congress, but before the 42nd Congress was convened, Logan was elected in 1872 as Senator, then in 1879, after ousting R. J. Oglesby, became senator for the second time and was chosen for the third time in 1885.

Beyond and above his record as a military leader, politician, and statesman, the General is remembered especially as a founder of Memorial Day. He conceived it and he inaugurated it on May 30, 1868. In one of his last public utterances, his plea was for "remembrance" especially for every disabled "Union soldier who served in the army and has an honorable discharge." He helped to organize the Grand Army of the Republic and served three times as president. He consistently associated himself with all matters related to veterans' relief.

In 1875, while senator, he delivered a lengthy and impassioned address on self-government, under the Constitution, in Louisiana—the scene of recent racial upheavals. He was referring to the so-called "Penn Rebellion" in that state against officials duly recognized by President Grant. He was interrupted by "manifestations of applause in the galleries" frequently. Excerpts from that address, one of many indicative of Logan's human and political philosophy, are:

Does Liberty mean wholesale slaughter? Does republican government mean tyranny and oppression of its citizens? Does an intelligent and enlightened age of civilization mean murder and pillage, bloodshed at the hands of Ku-Klux or White Leagues or anyone else ... ? I say then the happy days of this republic are gone ... Liberty of the citizen means the right to exercise such rights as are prescribed within the limits of the law so that he does not in the exercise of these rights infringe the rights of other citizens.

I was told that the old Republican ship was gone; but when I steadied myself on the shores bounding the political ocean of strife and commotion, I looked afar off and there I could see a vessel bounding the boisterous billows with white sails unfurled, marked on her sides, "Freighted with the hopes of mankind," while the great Mariner above, as her helmsman, steered her, navigated her to a haven of rest ...

Senator Logan then referred to President Grant who, said Logan, was "generous to a fault." Although he may have disagreed with him in the past, he has also "disagreed with me." Said Logan: "He is too magnanimous to permit anything of the past to influence his mind or his charity ... no one ever appealed to him in vain, for in his composition the elements that mark the North and South are strongly blended ..."

He (speaking of President Grant) attends to more wants of individuals than any man ever in Congress ... From every section of the country, from Maine to Mississippi, from the shores of the Atlantic to those of the Pacific; from every state in a Union undivided come letters to him from those who wore the blue and those who wore the gray, and none was ever rejected!

General John Alexander Logan, who began our tradition of honoring all Soldier Dead in 1868, died in Washington, D.C., in 1886, survived by his widow and two children. A dedication address at his Memorial in Grant Park, Chicago, saluted the founder of Memorial Day with these words: "He was a sincere, earnest friend, a faithful and loving husband and father. He was the idol of his party and demanded the respect and admiration of his political opponents."