SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR

Department of the Chesapeake

Patriotic Instruction – January 2022

It’s JANUARY 2022! Happy New Year!! At least we hope it will be a happy new year, or at least better than 2021. But we must ask ourselves, what does a new year, or a new month really mean? Does a date on the calendar really have any substantive meaning, or does it all come down to what we, as people, do during this time period?

Did you know that the month of January is named after the Roman god JANUS? He was believed to have two faces, one which allowed him to look forward into the coming year, and one backwards into the past year. Janus is also the Roman word for “door,” which seems somewhat appropriate, as it is a door of sorts, between one year and the next.

But January wasn’t always the beginning of the year, and New Year’s Day might seem strange to us in some other parts of the world. While on average, it is the coldest month of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, it is actually the second month of winter, and in the Southern Hemisphere January is a summer month the equivalent of our July. The ancient Saxons called January the “wolf month,” as it was the time of the year when hungry wolves began coming into towns searching for food. (Our hungry ancestor soldiers could probably relate to that)

Take a moment and think about all the thousands of “New Year’s Days” that have passed through history, and how millions of people reacted, or not, to the changes, if any, in their lives. On January 1, 1660 the “great plague” and fires ravaged London. In 1735, Patriot Paul Revere was born. In 1752, Betsy Ross was born. In 1801, Northern Ireland was added to Great Britain. In 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln. In 1892, Ellis Island opened in New York. In 1901, the Commonwealth of Australia was founded. In 1942, the Declaration of the United Nations was signed in Washington, DC., and the list goes on-and-on.

January is also traditionally a time of making resolutions, and subsequently for most, a time for breaking those same resolutions. What did our Civil War ancestors think, while standing guard duty on a cold winter New Year’s night in their winter camps? Or huddled around a fire trying to stay dry and warm? Some may have been lucky enough to find an abandoned house or barn, or maybe construct a small shelter to share with a fellow soldier, or two, or three, covered by a wool blanket. But then there was also the sailors and Marines, working and standing watch on the deck of a ship out on the ocean, with the freezing cold sting of the wind and water in their face. Not all suffered. Officers routinely enjoyed indoor accommodations, better food, and sometimes parties to liven up their “dreary” lives. Some were even lucky enough to have their families travel to wherever they were, and be able to spend the winter with them.

We, here today, often complain about our lot in life, what with COVID, commuting, bosses, financial obligations, family responsibilities, taxes, etc. But we often forget that we, like our ancestors, have persevered and survived through everything that has been put before us, and will continue moving forward for the betterment of others.

So, as we move forward Brothers, let us think of Janus, for whom the month of January is named. Let us look back, not at all the bad memories of the past year, but the memories of those good things we were able to accomplish in spite of our “hardships.” Then, again like Janus, let us face forward to the coming year, and see with futuristic vision all the new good things we can, and will, accomplish in 2022. Not everything will happen in an instant, or even as quickly as we would often like it to, but if we keep moving forward, many good things WILL happen.

Abraham Lincoln once said: **“I walk slowly, but I never walk backward.”**

I look forward to seeing you all safe and healthy, in 2022.

FC&L, Andrew W. Johnson, M.Ed., Patriotic Instructor, SUVCW, Department of the Chesapeake