



I want to welcome everyone here today for the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the charge of the 14th United States Colored Troops during the Battle of Decatur —Oct. 28, 1864.

When I was a young boy, I had a brother who had to dress up like a wounded Civil War soldier for a school play. Down came the musket over the fireplace mantle - the very one that now is on display at the nearby Morgan County Archives.

I was fascinated and wanted to know more about this Civil War. So I began reading. I saved my money and ordered books on the subject and checked many more out of the library.

Noticing my interest, my father took me to the battlefield of Shiloh. I saw the fields, the woods, the cannon and artifacts of that great battle of the war. On the way home, I asked my father, "What about Decatur? What happened there?"

The answer he gave and that I would hear for the next 40-plus years, was - "nothing much" or simply "nothing at all."

So I kept reading and studying. There was no Internet in those days so all research had to be done with leg-work and travel to various institutions to study dusty collections long forgotten by modern times.

When I found records of the 14th USCT, an idea formed in my mind that a Civil War Walking Trail would illustrate the story of all of the struggles that took place here, albeit in abbreviated form. It took another decade before city officials and a skeptical public would OK the project.

Since then, I am told that our city is host to numerous visitors every week that come here to learn about the Civil War. And that is part of the dollars and sense - S.E.N.S.E - of preserving our history. We simply cannot afford not to do so.

And now we are gathered at this place, at this time, to recognize what for so long has been forgotten.

we are gathered where    once stood a football stadium, where young boys were shaped into young men. But before them, on this ground where we are gathered today, young men helped shape a nation.

It is all too well and fitting that we recognize today, that courage has no color and no color should be a barrier in the pursuit of freedom.

When the 363 men of the 14th USCT advanced across this field at noon 150 years ago, some would not return. It was the last full measure they had to give.

As my study has continued, a couple of years ago I found the website for the Sons & Daughters of United States Colored Troops and contacted Mr. Asa Gordon. Yes, he said, his organization was planning a short trip to Decatur to mark the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the 14th. It was my understanding that they would merely slip in and then slip out of town. But that wouldn't do. And so a committee was formed that for nearly two years has worked continually to make these commemorative events happen.

I would like to thank Ms. Melinda Dunn, Judge David Breland, Mr. John Allison, Ms. Peggy Towns, Mr. Richard Armstrong, Ms. Lindy Ashwander, Ms. Judy Sizemore and Mr. Phil Wirey, for all of their hard work, talents and time to make these events the best they could be. Many more people also had a hand in making sure the I's were dotted and T's crossed. In addition, I would like to recognize the numerous city of Decatur and Morgan County officials, as well as the legislative delegation, and Senators Terri Collins and Arthur Orr, for their help in making these events a reality.

I thank all of you so much for coming together for this occasion.

In closing ... I would like to remind you that it was the gift of a father's time so long ago on a Saturday that led me to stand here before you today. And that is no small thing. As proud as I am of helping tell the story of Civil War Decatur, I am more proud that a good man shared his time with me.

Let there be no doubt, that whether Union or Confederate, history did happen here. Men fought and bled over this ground, and as a soldier of the 14th said to his officer after the charge here - "Capt. we're got it at last".

Please allow me to introduce to you now, from Washington, D.C., - Mr. Asa Gordon, Secretary-General of the national Sons & Daughters of United States Colored Troops.

Mr. Gordon