

ABSTRACT

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GRANTS FINAL DAYS

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INTRODUCTION

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Grant graduated 21st in a class of 37 from West Point Academy. During the Mexican War, Grant became a captain in the armed forces and was stationed at Fort Vancouver on the West Coast. It is thought by many historians that the loneliness of his outpost and for his family drove Grant to use alcohol to excess, and ultimately led to his resignation from the Army. He eventually overcame the habit, but it did later give his enemies a vulnerable area for attack which they used readily.

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[He] said that he had been a very light smoker prior to the attack of Fort Donnellan in 1862. At Admiral Foote's request, he had gone aboard the flag boat in the Cumberland River and had been given a cigar. On the road back to his command, he was met by a staff officer who told him the army was attacking vigorously. While giving the order for counterattack, Grant rode forward among the troops carrying the unlighted cigar in his hand. Grant states that 'in the accounts given in the papers, I was represented as smoking a cigar in the midst of conflict; and many persons, thinking no doubt that tobacco was my chief solace, sent me boxes of the choicest brands from everywhere in the north. As many as 10,000 were received. I gave away all I could get rid of but having such a quantity on hand, I naturally smoked more than

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Ulysses Simpson Grant was born and raised in Ohio. He stood nearly five feet, eight inches in height, wore a full beard and nearly always appeared a bit disheveled. He was said to have quiet manners, gravity, grey eyes and a face with economy of expression. He was described in later years as a man with an expression determined to drive his head through a brick wall and at any moment was about to do it.

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I would have under ordinary circumstances, and I have continued the habit ever since'"[3].

Following his resignation from the army in 1854, he purchased a farm near St. Louis, selling hides for shoes and saddles. In June of 1861 he became a colonel of the Illinois Volunteers as the Civil War erupted. In February of 1862, as a brigadier general of volunteers he captured Fort Donnelson, which was the first major Union victory. He was immediately promoted to major general. He was ultimately promoted to commander-in-chief of the Union forces to become one of our most celebrated war heros for his successful campaigns against the Confederate Army.

In 1869, he was elected 18th President of the United States, and served two terms. Although Grant's integrity was unquestioned, he appointed friends and army cronies to high government positions who took advantage of their posts. His administration eventually became plagued by scandal [1].

Following his two terms as president, Grant invested his savings and started a Wall Street investment firm. Once again, Grant's innately trusting nature resulted in the collapse of the firm as a result of massive swindling by his partner, Ferdinand Ward. Grant was left virtually penniless. In a final effort to save the company, Grant borrowed \$150,000 from his friend, William H. Vanderbilt, but this too was lost. Being an honest man, he considered the debt to Vanderbilt a private obligation. He turned over his house at 3 East 66th Street in New York, the farm in Missouri, a house in Philadelphia and all of his war trophies. Vanderbilt tried to return his trophies, but the family

would not accept, and they were ultimately donated to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington.

In June of 1884, nearly three weeks after the collapse of Grant's banking firm, he began to experience spasmodic contractions of the throat followed by severe lancinating pain. He stated "upon eating fruit, that my throat was sore, and that peaches particularly, of which I was very fond, gave me great trouble". The family urged him to see Dr. J.M. DaCosta, a noted Philadelphia surgeon. Dr. DaCosta's informal exam on the porch of Grant's home disclosed a mass at the base of the former President's tongue. DaCosta left a prescription and requested that he see his family physician, Dr. Fordyce Barker, unaware that Dr. Barker was in Europe for the summer [3]. By Dr. Barker's return in October, Grant's pain had worsened. After a preliminary examination, Grant was referred that same day to Dr. John Hancock Douglas, one of the foremost throat specialists of the times.

On October 22, 1884, Grant appeared in the office of Dr. Douglas. Douglas found "the velum inflamed, of a dark deep congestive hue, a scaly squamous inflammation, strongly suggestive of serious epithelial trouble" [3]. Most authors believe the lesion Douglas described to have been a T1N1 squamous cell carcinoma of the right tonsillar pillar. In reply to Grant's query regarding the nature of his illness, Dr. Douglas later wrote:

"The question having been asked, I could give no uncertain, hesitating reply. I gave that which I believed qualified with hope...I realized that if he once found that I had deceived him, I could never reinstate myself in his good

opinion. I said 'General, the disease is serious, epithelial in nature, and sometimes capable of being cured.' "[3]

Dr. Douglas, who became Grant's primary treating physician until the end, recommended gargles of permanganate of potash and yeast, salt water and dilute carbolic acid irrigations, and local applications of silver nitrate, H₂O₂ and iodoform powder to the growth. Grant was also ordered to stop smoking.

Dr. Douglas privately considered surgical extirpation of the lesion and consulted Dr. George F. Shrady, who had previously attended Fredrick III of Germany prior to his death from laryngeal carcinoma. Dr Shrady was also the editor of The Medical Record, and later published weekly bulletins about the General's condition. The surgery thought to result in the greatest chance for cure included the division of the mandible anterior to the ascending ramus, removal of the entire tongue and greater part of the soft palate together with the removal of the ulcerated and indurated tonsillar area. Both surgeons felt the procedure to be mechanically feasible but they were inclined to not recommend the procedure in the best interests of their distinguished patient "sparing him unnecessary mutilation and to spend the rest of his days in comparative comfort" [3]. The decision not to operate later generated intense controversy as Grant's final days were spent not in relative comfort but in increasing pain.

In financial ruin and faced with the prospects for a rapid demise, Grant sought to publish his memoirs in hopes of providing an estate for his wife and children. Mark Twain befriended Grant

and offered a generous sum and personal support to complete his book. He took on the task with great determination. Pain became an ever increasing problem for the former president. He found that the pain could be relatively well controlled with a topical solution of 4% cocaine. Twice daily he traveled by streetcar to the office of Dr. Douglas to receive topical cocaine to the tumor. This permitted Grant to swallow and to continue work on his book through that winter and into the spring. Later, when he became too weak to travel, Dr. Douglas visited his home, administering hypodermic injections of brandy and morphine along with local applications of cocaine.

Grant later described to Dr. Douglas the effects of cocaine:

"I have tried to study the question of the use of cocaine as impartially as possible considering I am the person affected by it's use. The conclusion I have come to in my case is this: taken properly it gives a wonderful amount of relief from pain. Gradually the parts near there when the medicine is applied become numb and partially paralyzed. The feeling is unpleasant but not painful. Without the use of it the parts not affected by the disease are pliable but of no use because their exercise moves the diseased parts and produces pain. When the medicine is being applied the tendency is to take more than there is any necessity and oftener. On the whole, my conclusion is to take it when it seems to be so much needed as it was at times yesterday. I will try to limit it's use. This later it is you know how hard it is to do."

Throughout the winter and into the spring, the progressive tumor growth was followed by his helpless physicians. Ulcerations of the tongue and larynx arose separate from the primary tumor mass. By April, 1885 the former president had hoarseness and difficulty swallowing. At one point, a massive hemorrhage occurred. The hemorrhage stopped after several hours, but Grant

was now aware that in addition to suffocation and extreme exhaustion, unrelenting bleeding could might also become his ultimate mode of exodus. Speech became impossible due to the swelling in his neck and he began to communicate by writing notes. He wrote a note to Dr. Douglas requesting that no further consultation with other physicians be arranged.

"I do not want any physician but yourself, but I tell you so that if you are unwilling to have me go without consultation with other professional men, you can send for them. I dread them, however, knowing that it means another desperate effort to save me, and more suffering."[2]

Grant, his family and Dr. Douglas moved to Mount McGregor, New York, near Saratoga Springs for the mountain air in late June. Mr. Vanderbilt tendered his private railroad car for the trip. His cervical lymph nodes had become so enlarged that he wore a muffler in public. He became progressively weaker and extremely emaciated with his weight decreasing to 130 pounds. On July 22nd, three days after completing his autobiography, Grant sensed the end was near and scribbled on a note pad that he wanted to be put to bed. His family and physicians recognized the gravity of this request because for months Grant had been sleeping in a chair in order to prevent the tumor from occluding his airway. On the evening before his death his hands and feet became icy cold and his pulse was rapid and weak. Repeated injections of brandy were given throughout the night. The following morning at 8:08 he died quietly with his family and Dr. Douglas at his side.

Although Grant suffered with protracted pain throughout the

course of his disease, he remained greatly admired by the nation for his courage and strength. He died in peace with the knowledge that his wife and family would be solvent, with his memoirs eventually generating nearly \$500,000. Today, Grant's Tomb in New York City serves as a permanent reminder of this brave Civil War hero and 18th President of the United States.

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