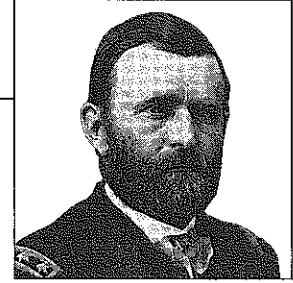


## Ulysses S. Grant

### Union General and President



*Ulysses S. Grant's leadership on the battlefield helped win the Civil War for the Union side. When he later became president at age 46, he was the youngest U.S. president ever elected up to that time.*

Ulysses S. Grant (1822–1885) was born Hiram Ulysses Grant. However, his parents always called him Ulysses. As a boy, Grant hated working in his father's tannery. But on his parent's Ohio farm, he became an accomplished horseback rider. Before entering West Point at age 17, Grant attended what he later called "indifferent" one-room schoolhouses. These schools were staffed by "a man or a woman incapable of teaching much, even if they imparted all they knew" to a group of 30 or 40 students. These students ranged from tiny children to 20-year-olds.

Grant's appointment to West Point was mistakenly made for Ulysses S. Grant. He kept the name. Grant ranked only 21 out of a class of 39 at West Point. However, he did well in both mathematics and horsemanship. Grant was posted to the U.S. Infantry near St. Louis. There he met and fell in love with Julia Boggs Dent. Their marriage in 1848 would produce four children.

**Success and Failure** Ulysses S. Grant served in the Mexican War. His skill with horses had led to his being posted as quartermaster, in charge of supply lines. But he longed to take part in battle. At the battle of Monterey, in September 1846, he mounted a successful charge. To bring back needed ammunition, Grant rode his horse through the city's bullet-ridden streets. The young officer pulled off this risky job unharmed. He did this by hanging off the side of his gray mare, Nellie. Such acts of bravery won him a promotion to captain.

Grant remained in the army after the war ended. He struggled to add to his salary so that he could keep his growing family together. Finally, in 1854, he resigned from the army. First he tried farming the 60 acres his father-in-law had given the young couple as a wedding present. By 1858, Grant saw

that farming would never bring in enough money. Next he tried selling real estate. Then he served as a rent collector in St. Louis. The failure of these attempts led the family to move to Galena, Illinois. For a time Grant worked in his family's leather store.

The Civil War threatened to divide the United States. It would give Grant his greatest success. At the start of the war, his father-in-law leaned toward the Confederacy. Grant wrote him in April 1861 that "all party distinctions should be lost sight of, and every true patriot be for maintaining the integrity of the glorious old Stars and Stripes, the Constitution and the Union."

**Civil War Service** Grant's first job in the Union army was to organize the troops in Illinois's capital, Springfield. In June 1861, he became colonel of the Twenty-first Illinois Volunteer Infantry. He was terrified before commanding his first battle in Missouri.

He later wrote, "My heart kept getting higher and higher until it felt to me as though it was in my throat. I would have given anything to be back in Illinois." To Grant's surprise, though, his enemy had disappeared. He learned, Grant wrote, that his foe "had been as much afraid of me as I had been of him. This was a view of the question I had never taken before."

**General Grant** Now a brigadier general, Grant won the Union's first major victory in January 1862. The Confederates surrendered Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River in Tennessee to Grant. He was promoted to major general. Then he advanced toward Vicksburg on the Mississippi River. The besieged city surrendered in July 1863. The Confederacy was split in two.

In March 1864, Grant was given command over all the Northern armies. His strategy for 1864 was to pin down General Robert E. Lee near Richmond, Virginia. Then General Sherman led a Union army south through Georgia. This plan finally achieved success in April 1865, with Lee's surrender at Appomattox.

General Grant remembered Lee from their army service together in the Mexican War. He later described what happened when they met at Appomattox.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

General Lee was dressed in a full uniform which was entirely new, and was wearing a sword of considerable value. . . . In my rough traveling suit, the uniform of a private with the straps of a lieutenant-general, I must have contrasted very strangely with a man so handsomely dressed, six feet high and of faultless form. But this was not a matter that I thought of until afterwards. . . . When news of the surrender first reached our lines our men commenced firing a salute of a hundred guns in honor of the victory. I at once sent word, however, to have it stopped. The Confederates were now our prisoners, and we did not want to exult over their downfall.

ULYSSES S. GRANT, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*

**Troubled Presidency** Grant's popularity after the war won him election to the presidency in 1868. The young president was politically inexperienced. Some of the many friends, relatives, and army officers he chose for cabinet posts were corrupt. Scandals plagued both terms of Grant's presidency. Despite his personal honesty and accomplishments, historians now consider Grant to have been one of the country's worst presidents.

Grant's failures in business continued after he left the presidency. He invested all his savings in a

business venture that went under in 1884. This failure left him with a \$150,000 debt.

**Final Triumph** The impoverished former president wrote three articles about the Civil War for *Century Magazine*. These well-written articles attracted a wide audience. People wanted to read more. Grant learned while writing these articles that he had cancer of the throat. He needed to support his family. So he decided to write and publish his memoirs with Mark Twain's publishing company. He was to receive 70 percent of the sales. This was a much better deal than the magazine had offered. It was the best business deal Grant ever made. Grant raced against pain and death. He finished the last chapter and then died just a few days later. His memoirs, which critics consider brilliant, earned \$450,000 for Grant's estate. They remain popular today.

### Review Questions

1. How did Grant's skill with horses come in handy during the Mexican War?
2. How well did Grant do at various careers in civilian life?
3. What important lesson did Grant learn during his first battle as a commander?

### Critical Thinking

4. **Summarizing** What were the main successes and failures of Grant's public life?
5. **Comparing** What differences were there in Robert E. Lee's and Ulysses S. Grant's appearance at Appomattox?
6. **Drawing Conclusions** How did the act of writing his memoirs show Grant's bravery?