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SPECIAL EDITION



ROBERT E. LEE
JANUARY 19, 1807 - OCTOBER 12, 1870

Yesterday, October 12th was the anniversary of the passing of Robert Edward Lee. Descendants of Confederate Veterans Founder and past President Steve Lucas put pen to paper to share his admiration for Robert E. Lee and commemorate the day.

Today I Mourn

On the morning of October 12, 1870, one of the greatest human beings ever born on the North American continent...or likely anywhere else...passed away at his home in Lexington, Virginia at the age of 63. He was serving at the time as President of Washington College. Robert E. Lee had been perhaps most famous as the Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia for the Confederacy in the recently completed Civil War. Prior to that he had been a career officer in the United States Army, including a period as Superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point. He had graduated from that institution second in his class with no demerits on his record. He was the son of the famous "Light Horse Harry" Lee who had served with George Washington in the American Revolution and who said of Washington on his death that Washington was; "First in War, First in Peace, and First in the Hearts of his Countrymen." Lee was known to all as a devout Christian who was not in favor of secession, not in favor of slavery, was offered a high command in the Union Army prior to the outbreak of hostilities with the South but resigned from the Army rather than take up his sword against his native Virginia.

Lee was a hero to the men, women and children of the South. One only need pick up a contemporary source of the time to find that so. The soldiers under him would follow General Lee wherever he wanted to go. Wives and mothers took comfort knowing that their loved one was fighting with Lee, and after the War Lee was well known for his efforts to reconcile the nation. He signed his oath of allegiance and requested a pardon from the President of the United States.

Aside from Lincoln, I would guess that more research has been done on Lee and more words written about him than any other figure of the war. Virtually every day of the War and what he did on it has been chronicled. Every military decision he made has been analyzed, critiqued, criticized and admired or second guessed for over 150 years. Likewise, every word he wrote and every conversation he had has been scrutinized looking for meaning and hidden meaning. For the Southerners it is an exercise in admiration. For many others it is in an attempt to discredit him and try to prove that he was something other than what his contemporaries and admirers have held him out to be...a great Southern Christian gentleman, leader, family man and hero.

Robert E. Lee died in 1870. He hasn't written a word or uttered an opinion on anything since then. Since that time researchers, "historians", die-hard haters of all things Southern and many others have taken their best shots at him in their attempts to throw mud on him and his reputation. They have been largely unsuccessful. The best they seem to be able to come up with is that he was a human being of the time period who had his flaws. No matter how hard they may try, no matter how many words they write or how cleverly they attempt to turn a phrase they are not able to impugn his character, his devotion to God and family, his dedication to his duty and his home or the example he set for all of those around him. He is acknowledged to have been well above average as a field commander and his tactics and strategy are taught in United States military classrooms to this day. He was admired prior to the Civil War by his contemporaries and decorated for his military accomplishments. He was a combat leader and wounded in action during the Mexican War. He was admired in the North and the South during and following the Civil War (Lee himself used the term Civil War and so I feel comfortable using it also) and after the war he was visited by former troops of both sides just to see him and shake his hand. After the war he devoted himself for the remainder of his life to educating the youth of America, bringing innovation and new courses to Washington College in Virginia. He had a chapel built to see to the spiritual well-being of the students, faculty and staff there and imposed but one rule on the students – that they all be Gentlemen. He knew all of the students by name and held them to high standards. He sent a number of them home when they did not live up to those standards. Accounts state that the students loved him, never wanted to do anything to disappoint him and that one of the worst things that could happen was to misbehave and receive word that General Lee wanted to see you in his office.

When Lee passed away the entire country mourned, not just Lexington or Virginia or the South. The following was printed in New York City in the New York Herald:

"On a quiet autumn morning, in the land which he loved so well and served so faithfully, the spirit of Robert Edward Lee left the clay which it had so much ennobled and traveled out of this world into the great and mysterious land. Here in the North, forgetting that the time was when the sword of Robert Edward Lee was drawn against us—forgetting and forgiving all the years of bloodshed and agony—we have long since ceased to look upon him as the Confederate leader, but have claimed him as one of ourselves; have cherished and felt proud of his military genius; have recounted and recorded his triumphs as our own; have extolled his virtue as reflecting upon us—for Robert Edward Lee was an American, and the great nation which gave him birth would be today unworthy of such a son if she regarded him lightly.

"Never had mother a nobler son. In him the military genius of America was developed to a greater extent than ever before. In him all that was pure and lofty in mind and purpose found lodgment. Dignified without presumption, affable without familiarity, he united all those charms of manners which made him the idol of his friends and of his soldiers and won for him the respect and admiration of the world. Even as in the days of triumph, glory did not intoxicate, so, when the dark clouds swept over him, adversity did not depress."

Following is a well-known quote. Many may not know that it was written about General Lee on the occasion of his death.

"He was a foe without hate; a friend without treachery; a soldier without cruelty; a victor without oppression, and a victim without murmuring. He was a public officer without vices; a private citizen without wrong; a neighbour without reproach; a Christian without hypocrisy, and a man without guile. He was a Caesar, without his ambition; Frederick, without his tyranny; Napoleon, without his selfishness, and Washington, without his reward."

Now, in 2017, great efforts are being made to have his name erased from the face of the earth. The true Lee scholars are silent – afraid of being labeled racists if they speak what they know to be true about him. It's very sad because General Lee's character most certainly would not allow him to remain silent in a similar circumstance, even if the person being so maligned were once a mortal enemy. Not only is the name of General Lee being erased but also those of other Confederate leaders, as well as monuments and memorials to the common Confederate soldiers. Again, the scholars are either being silent, or using the opportunity to sell books or rake in appearance fees by jumping on the bandwagon and touting how bad the South was and blaming all the evils of the world since the Great Flood on the 4 years of the Confederacy. The public, in their ignorance of all things prior to the previous 24 hour new cycle, are eating it up.

We might ask ourselves...What would General Lee do? Such is a question we cannot answer. We don't know what he would do. General Lee was a man of a different era. We cannot suddenly transport him to 2017. We can, however, make one fairly reasonable determination and be pretty confident that we will be correct. We can figure that the character of General Lee would be the same, no matter what. Robert E. Lee would still be Robert E. Lee no matter what year he happened to be living in. He would display the personality and character traits that he displayed all of his life. He would display the leadership and personality that drew people to him. We should remember that he didn't win every fight he was in and that he even surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia!...but he was loved and revered anyway.

I am confident that General Lee would have been a fervent believer in the publication of the truth, whatever it was, and would have been quite vocal in his opposition to anything that he believed was not factual. I also believe that he would have been forthcoming in stating why he did what he did in order to nip any speculation and second guessing in the bud before it ever got started. I have no idea what he would do with the present day people who choose not to believe the truth, even when it is put before them, and then act on rumor, ignorance, racism and falsehood and form themselves into mobs. But I am

sure of one thing; he would do it with the dignity, character, grace, and yes the fire, that only he could possess.

More and more we are called on to defend the actions of our Southern ancestors during that 4 year period. It's becoming more and more difficult because the truth is becoming less and less relevant and even a hint of a defense of the South is met with cries of racism. Media and even scholars (who should know better) are eager to make headlines and mobs of alt-left and alt-right (neither of whom are interested in anything but anarchy) are eager to take to the streets and fight with clubs, knives, etc. That leaves us caught in the middle without a friend in sight. General Lee was also familiar with "overwhelming numbers and resources." I do not know what tomorrow will bring. I know that I will do my best to defend those who came before me. They are my family and I am duty bound to do so and we all know what General Lee had to say about duty. I also know that I will do my best and I think we should all make a conscious effort to make General Lee proud of us. We, too, are his soldiers just as our ancestors were. When you write a letter (e-mail, text, etc.) or make a presentation or chat about the War with someone...make General Lee proud of you. Know the kind of man he was and represent him well. As General John Gregg, commanding Hood's Texas Brigade at the Battle of the Wilderness so famously called out to the Texans; "The Eyes of General Lee are Upon You.

Steve Lucas

About the Author

Growing up in southwestern Virginia, the breadbasket of the Confederacy, and the stomping grounds of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson (and birthplace of Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston), I learned of Lee from a very early age. I was visiting Washington and Lee University and VMI so early in my youth that I can remember being there but was so young that I can't even remember how young I was ---- yet I have the images of that time burned in my memory. Whenever I get back to Virginia I am drawn there like a moth to a flame. I must get back to see General Lee and General Jackson and I am antsy until I do so. I feel more calm and settled once I pay my respects.

