

PRESENTATION TO US CAPITOL COMMISSION for Historical Monuments

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NOV 17, 2020

My name is COL Donald Clary, a 32-year veteran of the US Army and the Virginia Army National Guard. Thank you for providing me an opportunity to express my views on the removal and replacement of the statue of Gen Robert E Lee in the US Capitol.

Robert E. Lee was born Jan 19, 1807 at Stratford Hall, Westmoreland County, Va. He was one of six children. His father was Gen Henry "Lighthorse Harry" Lee, who graduated from Princeton College. In 1773, he postponed studying law, to join the American Revolutionary Forces. Promoted to CPT by VA Governor Patrick Henry, Lee became trusted confidant and outstanding officer in Revolutionary War. Great friend of Gen Washington until Washington's death in 1799. Served with Gen Greene until Cornwallis surrender in Yorktown. He later served in the Continental Congress and the VA Convention to adopt US Constitution in 1788. He also served as Governor of VA from 1791-1794. President Washington appointed him as CDR troops in 1794 and he put down the Whiskey Rebellion w/o bloodshed in Western PA and was promoted to MG in 1798 and discharged in 1800. US Congressman (VA) 1799-1801. When Washington died, he was asked to deliver eulogy. It began "First in War, First in Peace, First in the hearts of his countrymen." His mother was Anne Hill Carter, the second wife of General Harry Lee, whom he married in 1793. They had six children and raised two stepchildren from his first wife, who died in 1790.

The family moved to Alexandria when Robert was a small child. Lee was 11 when his father died in 1818 & he became the primary caretaker of his invalid mother and younger siblings. He was schooled from 1824-1825 at the Hollowell School and entered USMA (West Point) in 1825 and graduated second in his class in 1829. Upon graduation he was commissioned 2LT in the Army Corps Engineers. His classmate was Joseph H Johnston from VA. His assignments were mostly in construction at FT Pulaski (Savannah), FT Monroe (Hampton Roads), Arlington, and in 1833 he was assigned as assistant to the Chief of Engineers on the Army staff.

LT Lee was married in 1831 to Mary Anne Randolph Custis, only surviving child of George Washington Peake Custis, the grandson of Martha and George Washington. Mr. Custis grew up at Mount Vernon and later built a splendid mansion in Arlington in 1804 when he married Mary Lee Fitzhugh. Their home and property became the home of COL Robert and Mary Lee when Mr. Custis died in 1855. The property was confiscated by the federal government when the Civil War began and is now part of the Arlington National Cemetery. Robert and Mary Lee's first child was born in 1832 at the Custis home in Arlington. Captain Lee had several assignments in the Midwest removing obstacles along the Mississippi River until he was sent to Fort Hamilton and put in charge of the defenses in NY Harbor. In 1846 he was sent to fight in the Mexican War and in 1847, GEN Winfield Scott asked for CPT Lee to be assigned to his Army command, which was fighting in Vera Cruz. CPT Lee's performance was so outstanding manner that he was promoted after each battle. Lee's heroics in The Pedregal, resulted in extremely high praise from Gen Scott and he was promoted to Colonel. After the Mexican War ended, he was sent to Baltimore construct and improve defenses. He was Superintendent, USMA from 1852 to 1855. His son, Custis, was a student at West Point 1850-1854. In 1855 he was sent to Texas to fight the Indians and remained on duty there until 1861. Later that year, COL Lee returned for the funeral of Mr. Custis, his father-in-law and helped his wife and mother-in-law settle the estate. He also returned in 1859 on leave to support

his wife while her mother was battling a serious illness. While on leave he was sent to Harpers Ferry to suppress the John Brown Raid and later to Richmond to advise the VA Legislature on preparing defenses in case other raids occurred. He returned to Texas later that year and in Feb 1861, when Texas seceded from the Union, COL Lee was recalled to Washington.

On April 18, 1861 COL LEE was summoned to meet, across the street from the White House, at the home of Mr. Frances Blair. MR Blair, on behalf of the President Lincoln, offered COL Lee a promotion to Major General and command of the Union Army that was being assembled to invade the Southern States. COL Lee stated to Mr. Blair “you must know my home is right across the Potomac in Arlington, my family is spread all-across this area of VA. I never thought I would see the day when a President of the United States would raise an army of 75,000 soldiers to fight his own country. Please convey to the President my deepest honor and gratitude for his offer, but I must decline. Let him know I have always taken my duties seriously, and please be clear, **I have no greater duty than to my home, to Virginia**”.

Directly after the meeting, he went across the street to the War Department and informed Gen Winfield Scott, SR Army officer at the War department, of the offer he received from Mr. Blair and his decision. On April 20, after much thought and prayer with his family at his home in Arlington, COL Lee submitted his resignation to Gen Scott. COL Lee was a distinguished US Army officer for almost 36 years.

**In our Country, history has proven that-Politicians decide on which wars we fight and the soldiers have to fight the wars!**

On April 22, he was summoned to Richmond by VA Governor John Letcher and offered the Command of the Army of Virginia. Col Lee accepted the command and promotion to General. The next day he promised the members of the VA General Assembly to defend the citizens of Virginia and their land from invasion by the Union Army. The citizen soldiers in the Confederate Army were all UNPAID volunteers and lacked the necessary weapons, rations, ammunition, and supplies to be successful in battle, but they fought courageously for 4 years until Gen Lee convinced the leaders of the Confederacy to surrender. On April 9, 1865 in Appomattox, Gen Lee negotiated with Gen Grant the surrender of the Confederate Army. Gen Grant agreed to Gen Lee’s demand that the US grant clemency to all confederate soldiers so they could return to their homes and families without fear of persecution or reprisals.

General Lee, a sixth generation Virginian, was a distinguished officer in the US Army and the Army of Virginia for nearly 40 years! In August 1865, the board of trustees at Washington College in Lexington, VA offered him the presidency the college and he took the oath of office in October 1865. His four years as Superintendent at West Point contributed to his five years of success at Washington College. In a time when many others were broken and depressed, he looked ahead with courage and optimism. General Lee’s example was an inspiration, and the students perceived the wisdom of his words: “All good citizens must unite in honest efforts to obliterate the effects of war, and to restore the blessings of peace. They must not abandon their country but go to work and build up its prosperity”. The old school was given new life. General Lee repaired the buildings, improved the grounds, planted trees, added new courses of study, and secured additional teachers. He served as President until his death on Oct.2,1870. The college’s governing body decided to rename the school Washington & Lee in 1871 because of his outstanding leadership and dedication to developing young leaders to serve their country. His remains rest in the Lee Mausoleum on the campus of Washington & Lee University.VA.

**General Lee was a distinguished military officer and leader of two renowned educational institutions during his adult life. He served his country, his state, and his family for over 64 years with honor, courage and integrity. He was not a politician; he was not a slave owner. He was against secession and slavery. He was against a “deprecating War” between the States and decided to resign his Army commission, rather than LEAD THE UNION ARMY in the invasion of VIRGINIA.**

NOW, 155 years after the US agreed not to persecute or require reprisals from any confederate soldiers, I am distressed to learn that this committee is recommending removal of the statue of GEN Lee, **WHO STOOD UP FOR VA**, from the US Capitol Statutory Hall of Historical Monuments.

I respectfully request that you rescind your recommendation to remove General Lee’s statue from the US Capitol and **STAND UP FOR GEN LEE!** Please notify the Governor and the Virginia Legislature that Gen Robert E Lee meets the eight criteria established by your committee this year and should, therefore, remain in the Statutory Hall of the US Capitol. **REMEMBER, OUR POLITICIANS DECIDED ON THE WARS WE FOUGHT AND OUR SOLDIERS FOUGHT THEM!** Please do not set a precedent in Virginia by degrading and disrespecting our Veterans by destroying or removing statues that were built to honor their sacrifice and service.

I have two Questions I would like to ask each member of the commission. Please respond to the answers at the email address below. Thank you for your cooperation and your service to the Commonwealth of Virginia and its citizens:

1. What information about General Lee’s life, service and performance compelled you to vote to remove & replace General Robert E. Lee’s Statue in the Statuary Hall in the US Capitol?
2. As a career military officer in both the US Army and the VNG, I have tried to put myself in General Lee’s position during that time in history and asked myself what would I have done and I came to a reasonable conclusion. As a lifelong resident of Virginia and retired COL of the Virginia National Guard, I would, as my Virginia National Guard oath stipulated, **DEFEND THE COMMONWEALTH OF VA against all enemies, foreign and domestic, SO HELP ME GOD!**

If you were in General Lee’s position in April 1861, what would have been your response to

President Lincoln’s official representative?

To the Governor of VA?

References:

1. Book: “Robert E Lee and his Family” by John W. Wayland
2. Book: “Robert E Lee: The Man and the Soldier” by Philip Van Doren Stern
3. Book: “Gods and Generals” by Jeffrey M. Shaara

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