

# ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

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## “We Are Not A Frade Of The Yankees While We Have Old General Lee”: Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia

By **J. Tracy Power**, Newberry College

The Army of Northern Virginia is the best-known and most successful of all the Confederate armies in the American Civil War. Its mark on the popular consciousness is so strong that many people believe that it was *the* Confederate Army; that General Robert E. Lee was the ranking Confederate general for the entire war; and that Appomattox, where it surrendered to its Union foes in the Army of the Potomac in April 1865, was the place where the war ended.

Once the Confederate capital moved to Richmond, less than one hundred miles from Washington, D.C., Virginia became the major arena of the war in the east. The Union Army of the Potomac focused its efforts against the Confederate capital and the army that defended it. The Confederate Army of the Potomac, commanded briefly by General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard and subsequently by General Joseph Eggleston Johnston, formed the nucleus of the Army of Northern Virginia and was officially given that name in the fall of 1861. On June 1, 1862, after Johnston was seriously wounded at Seven Pines, Robert E. Lee succeeded him. He would command the army for the rest of the war, and they would win the greatest Confederate victories together.

Most Americans, and many others, are familiar with a version of the Civil War in which Lee and his gallant but outmatched army play an essentially heroic but ultimately tragic part, one in which the extraordinary bond forged between them both highlights and humanizes their successes and their failures. Roy Blount’s *Penguin Lives* biography of Lee calls that relationship a key to understanding the general and his soldiers. “Many men,” Blount writes, “wrote home that they continued to fight through the darkest hours only because Lee continued to lead them.”<sup>1</sup> One Rebel wrote to a Richmond newspaper in the summer of 1864, “What Marse Robert says is gospel in this squad.”<sup>2</sup> This view of Lee and his soldiers persists and flourishes in print, on film, in the interpretation of battlefields and other sites associated with the general and his army, and in American

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Blount, Jr., *Robert E. Lee*, (New York: Penguin Lives, 2003), 91.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous Soldier of Pickett’s Division, *Richmond Sentinel* (Richmond, VA), 14 July 1864.

popular culture. Stephen Vincent Benét's brilliant epic poem *John Brown's Body* describes the Army of Northern Virginia as a "fabulous army" during its brief existence and a legend since: "And the legend has made your fame and has dimmed that fame."<sup>3</sup>

Many twentieth- and twenty first-century historians consider Lee's stature as something created more after the war than during it, as a response to and a rationalization of Confederate defeat. That interpretation, perhaps best expressed in Robert Penn Warren's observation that "in the moment of its death the Confederacy entered upon its immortality," obscures our understanding of the relationship between the general and his men as it was created, nurtured, strengthened, and maintained during the war itself.<sup>4</sup> The wartime evidence demonstrating the breadth, depth, and strength of that bond is both extensive and persuasive. Both general and soldiers acknowledged and embraced their reliance upon each other long before their deeds passed into memory, history, and legend.

Lee and his soldiers often wrote of each other with pride. The army's officers marveled at what their common soldiers were capable of doing. Lee himself replied to a Confederate congressman's letter praising him for his victory at Chancellorsville by giving the credit to his men instead. "There never were such men in an Army before & there never can be better in any army again. If properly led they will go anywhere & never falter at the work before them."<sup>5</sup> A South Carolina corporal, meanwhile, wrote his mother about the same time, "Genl Lee says his infantry can never be whipped."<sup>6</sup> One member of Lee's headquarters staff wrote his wife during the fighting at Spotsylvania a year later, "You never saw men fight like ours do. Almost to a man they behave as though death were nothing."<sup>7</sup> A Virginia artillery captain wrote from Petersburg soon afterwards, "the Army of N. Va. is of extraordinary quality, 'tho we say it ourselves."<sup>8</sup>

Once he took command of the army, Lee soon placed his stamp on it so firmly that it was easy then, and is still easy, to forget that it was ever anything but "Lee's army." One officer, who met him a few weeks later, commented, "there never was a man upon whom greatness is more stamped."<sup>9</sup> Most of his soldiers not only respected their

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Vincent Benét, *John Brown's Body* 49<sup>th</sup> printing (New York: 1928, 1966), 165-6.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War* (New York: Random House, 1961), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Lee to William C. Rives, 21 May 1863, in Elizabeth Brown Pryor, *Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee Through His Private Letters* (New York: Viking, 2007), 490.

<sup>6</sup> Taliaferro N. Simpson to his mother, 7 May 1863, in Guy R. Everson and Edward H. Simpson, Jr., eds., *Far, Far From Home: The Wartime Letters of Dick and Tally Simpson, Third South Carolina Volunteers* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 226.

<sup>7</sup> Charles S. Venable to his wife, 11 May 1864. Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC (hereafter cited as NcU).

<sup>8</sup> John Hampden Chamberlayne to Miss Sally Grattan, 19 August 1864, C.G. Chamberlayne, ed., *Ham Chamberlayne—Virginian: Letters and Papers of an Artillery Officer in the War for Southern Independence* (Richmond: Press of the Dietz, 1932), 259.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Minor Blackford to his wife, 19-26 August 1862, Susan Leigh Blackford, comp., and Charles Minor Blackford III, ed., *Letters from Lee's Army: Or, Memoirs of Life in and out of the Army in Virginia during the War between the States* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1947), 114.

commanding general but also came to love him, and even to call him “Marse Robert” as a sign of deference. Lee gradually became a symbol of the Confederate cause in spite of his wishes to the contrary. Praise—and expectations, often unreasonable ones—followed every victory, especially when compared to the struggles of other Rebel generals and armies elsewhere. Such responses, furthermore, never gave way to widespread carping and criticism after minor setbacks, stalemates, or even outright defeats.

This army was molded by Lee’s belief that the best chance for the Confederacy to defeat the Union was for it to concentrate its armies against portions of the Federal armies opposing it, and to take and keep the strategic and tactical initiative whenever and wherever possible. His army’s successes, and its willingness to continue fighting against lengthening odds, were in many ways forged out of his expectation that his officers and men could do whatever he asked of them and theirs that he would lead them to final victory. His reputation soared after the Seven Days Campaign. Writing his personal recollections in the 1890s, Lee’s brilliant artilleryman Porter Alexander summed up the special connection between the general and his soldiers with the observation that after Second Manassas and for the rest of the war “his confidence in them, & theirs in him, were so equal that no man can yet say which was greatest.”<sup>10</sup> That confidence helped produce a spirit of optimism in the South and a corresponding apprehension in the North that persisted for the next two years and longer, even after it became clear that Lee’s army was no longer capable of victories like its early ones.

Aggressive, at times even reckless, the soldiers of the Army of Northern Virginia were among the best of their era or any other, whether attacking a position or defending one. Their fierce charges and stubborn stands were the stuff from which their legend was being written, long before the war ended. In a period of ten months from the Seven Days through Chancellorsville these Confederates were transformed from a mass of citizen-soldiers into a formidable army. As completely as any soldiers in history did, these men won and frequently confirmed the reliance displayed in them by their field and company officers, their generals, and their commanding general himself. Members of the army often boasted of belonging to it, especially in contrast to their enemies in the Army of the Potomac, but also in contrast to any other Confederate army as well. One North Carolina sergeant whose brigade joined the army near the midpoint of the war observed, “tho it is more dangerous, yet I must say that I am proud to be able to say, I belong to Gen. Lee’s army.”<sup>11</sup>

Lee’s genuine admiration and fatherly concern for his soldiers was a significant part of the special bond between them. “I wish to take advantage of every opportunity to inspire & encourage them,” he wrote Confederate President Jefferson Davis, “& induce

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<sup>10</sup> Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 139.

<sup>11</sup> George Whitaker Wells to Lucy Wills Hunter, 25 May 1863, in Manly Wade Wellman, *Rebel Boast: First at Bethel—Last at Appomattox* (New York: Henry Holt, 1956), 109.

the officers & men to believe that their labours are appreciated.”<sup>12</sup> His soldiers, who knew that he believed in them and cared about them, believed in him and cared about him in equal measure. They were proud of marching and fighting under Lee and often mentioned him in their letters and diaries. An Alabama private put it as simply as he could, writing home, “we are not a frade of the yankees while we have old Genel Lee to lead us in the fites.”<sup>13</sup> A Georgia private wrote a letter to the *Richmond Examiner* calling the general “kind, generous, and wise, in fact, can be surpassed by no General that ever lived.”<sup>14</sup>

In less than three years together Lee and his men became the hope of a young nation. Early success in pushing the Federals from the outskirts of Richmond in the summer of 1862 bred more success in northern Virginia. Growing confidence bred still more confidence, so much so that the failure of the campaign into Maryland seemed less significant to most contemporaries than it would later prove to be. “Of all the Genls I think Genl Lee is by far the most superior,” a South Carolina lieutenant commented that fall. “He has no equal in this continent, in my estimation.”<sup>15</sup> Two months later, after an impressive victory at Fredericksburg, a surgeon claimed, “It does not seem possible to defeat this army now with General Lee at its head.”<sup>16</sup>

That feeling in and on behalf of the Army of Northern Virginia reached its apex in the first half of 1863, especially after its victory at Chancellorsville. The editors of the *Richmond Whig*, in an editorial just after that battle titled “Lee and Jackson” and published the day before Stonewall Jackson died, examined the relationship between Lee and his most famous subordinate and concluded, “The central figure of this war is, beyond all question, that of Robert E. Lee.”<sup>17</sup> Most of the officers and enlisted men in Lee’s army certainly thought so. Soon afterward a Georgia private wrote, “All the Army impose the utmost confidence in our hero (Gen’r’l R.E. Lee), for what ever he says must be done, [and it] is done with alacrity nothing doubting.”<sup>18</sup> That conviction, in and on behalf of the army, reached its apex as Lee and his men marched into Pennsylvania almost certain—as their commander himself said—that they could go anywhere and do anything. “This is the best army in the world I expect,” one of his noncommissioned

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<sup>12</sup> Lee to Jefferson Davis, 20 May 1863, Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin, eds., *The Wartime Papers of R.E. Lee* (Boston: Little Brown, 1961), 488.

<sup>13</sup> James Preston Crowder to his family, 9 April [misdated 9 August] 1864, James Preston Crowder Papers, Emory University, Atlanta, GA (hereafter cited as GEU).

<sup>14</sup> “YOUR MULE,” *Richmond Examiner* (Richmond, VA), 14 January 1865.

<sup>15</sup> John W. Carlisle to B.B. Foster, 26 October 1862, J.R. McKissick Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

<sup>16</sup> Spencer Glasgow Welch to his wife, 28 December 1862, *A Confederate Surgeon’s Letters To His Wife* (New York and Washington DC: Neale Publishing, 1911), 39.

<sup>17</sup> “Lee and Jackson,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 9 May 1863.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel J.G. Brewer to his wife, 11 June 1863, quoted in Travis Hudson, “Soldier Boys In Gray: A History of the 59<sup>th</sup> Georgia Volunteer Infantry Regiment,” *The Atlanta Historical Journal* XXIII:1 (Spring 1979): 53.

officers wrote home not long before the campaign began. “We are all satisfied with General Lee and he is always ready for a fight.”<sup>19</sup>

Three bloody days at Gettysburg cost the army a third of its men and proved to friends and foes alike that it was not invincible. The campaign, however, was more a disappointment than a disaster, certainly as viewed at the time.<sup>20</sup> When Lee offered to resign shortly afterward, Jefferson Davis refused, saying that critics could not detract from “achievements which will make you and your army the subject of history and object of the worlds admiration for generations to come.”<sup>21</sup> The Army of Northern Virginia still believed in Lee and in itself, and he still believed in it. “The army did all it could,” he wrote a cousin. “I fear I required of it impossibilities. But it responded to the call nobly and cheerfully, and though it did not win a victory it conquered a success.”<sup>22</sup> Some of his officers and men blamed their defeat on overconfidence, whether on their part, their commander’s, or both. A South Carolina sergeant wrote his brother, “we like to have got our army destroyed just at the time we needed it the worst. It will learn Gen Lee a lesson he had too much confidence in his army he thought there was no place but he could take it but the mountains at Gettysburg was rather too much for him.”<sup>23</sup> Two weeks later, however, with the army safely back in Virginia, a staff officer claimed that Lee and his men would have beaten George G. Meade and the Army of the Potomac easily if not for the strong defensive position it held on those “mountains.” “Lee’s army is now the great hope of the South,” he argued, in language many of his comrades would have endorsed. “There is a terrible band of veterans here yet.”<sup>24</sup>

After spending the rest of 1863 in relative inactivity, those veterans began the spring campaign of 1864 cautiously optimistic but more determined than ever. A Georgia wrote his aunt, “You may always know that where Gen Lee’s brave and gallant band meet the Yankies they show the true grit of the Southern soldiery.”<sup>25</sup> A month of bloody

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<sup>19</sup> Frederick H. West to Maggie, 18 May 1863, in Daniel E. Sutherland, *Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville: The Dare Mark Campaign* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 193.

<sup>20</sup> See, for a valuable assessment of the campaign in its proper context, Gary W. Gallagher, “Lee’s Army Has Not Lost Any of Its Prestige: The Impact of Gettysburg on the Army of Northern Virginia and the Confederate Home Front,” in Gallagher, *Lee and His Army in Confederate History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Jefferson Davis to Lee, 11 August 1863, William J. Cooper, ed., *Jefferson Davis: The Essential Writings* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 317.

<sup>22</sup> Lee to Margaret Stuart, 26 July 1863, Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers*, 561.

<sup>23</sup> James Butler Suddath to his brother, 19 August 1863, Frank B. Williams, Jr., ed., “From Sumter to the Wilderness: Letters of Sergeant James Butler Suddath, Co. E, 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment S.C.V.,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 63:2 (April 1962): 100.

<sup>24</sup> William Edgeworth Bird to his wife, John Rozier, ed., *The Granite Farm Letters: The Civil War Correspondence of Edgeworth and Sallie Bird* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 125.

<sup>25</sup> William R. Montgomery to his aunt, 19 January 1864, George F. Montgomery, Jr., ed., *Georgia Sharpshooter: The Civil War Diary and Letters of William Rhadamanthus Montgomery, 1839-1906* (Macon: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 101.

but inconclusive fighting convinced many Southerners that Lee and his men could keep the Yankees out of Richmond indefinitely. Douglas Southall Freeman describes the army by the time of the Overland Campaign from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor in May and June 1864: “In the largest sense, only Lee and the men in the ranks still made the army terrible in battle.”<sup>26</sup> Frank Vandiver’s vigorous history of the Confederacy, published not long after the Civil War Centennial, described Lee’s stature in the last two years of the war: “More and more the people came to cherish him, to identify the cause with him, to make him a symbol of survival. Part of the burden, of course, his army shared . . . What was happening was simple enough—Lee and his men were becoming the whole of the cause.”<sup>27</sup> The army’s confidence in General Lee and itself was one of the critical factors allowing it to persevere as long as it did. Russell Weigley’s recent history of the Civil War puts it even more succinctly than Vandiver did: “Lee persisted, the Army of Northern Virginia persisted, and the war persisted.”<sup>28</sup>

Four incidents that occurred during the vicious combat in the Wilderness and at Spotsylvania are as dramatic as any moments in the army’s entire history and vivid confirmation of what Lee and his soldiers meant to each other. In each instance Lee rode forward, intending to head a charge himself as soldiers all around him called out, “Go back, General Lee, go back. Lee to the rear!” Not once, and not on the spur of the moment, but four times in less than a week, and in battles that had no identifiable rear and therefore no guaranteed safe place even for the commanding general of an army, Lee tried to command individual brigades in moments of extreme crisis, but was protected by officers and men who would not let him go with them.<sup>29</sup> A North Carolinian wrote his father, “you would be astonished to see Moss-Bob all ways ride along the line in the thickest of the fight he should not expose him self so but it is his will to do so.”<sup>30</sup>

Lee wrote Davis about the same time that in spite of intense combat and staggering losses in the Wilderness and at Spotsylvania “the courage of this army was never better,” while a war correspondent for a Richmond newspaper claimed, “General Lee trusts his troops most implicitly, whilst they in turn confide in their chief with child

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<sup>26</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *R.E. Lee: A Biography*, (New York: Scribners & Sons, 1932-34), 3:447.

<sup>27</sup> Frank E. Vandiver, *Their Tattered Flags: The Epic of the Confederacy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 258.

<sup>28</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *A Great Civil War: A Military and Political History, 1861-1865* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 423.

<sup>29</sup> The best accounts of the four “Lee to the Rear” incidents are by Robert K. Krick, in his essays “‘Lee to the Rear,’ the Texans Cried,” in Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *The Wilderness Campaign* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), and “An Insurmountable Barrier between the Army and Ruin: The Confederate Experience at Spotsylvania’s Bloody Angle,” in Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *The Spotsylvania Campaign* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Jesse M. Frank to his father, 19 May 1864, Alexander Frank Papers, Duke University, Durham, NC.

like faith.”<sup>31</sup> A few weeks later, when a straggler belonging to the army heard that Lee had arrived at Petersburg, he reassured a few sick and wounded Confederates nearby, “You hear that, boys? It’s all right now. . . . I ain’t goin’ to make myself miserable about the thing any more.”<sup>32</sup>

The stalemate that followed after the opposing armies reached the outskirts of Petersburg seemed to lend weight to the idea that the army was the only possible hope of the Confederate cause. “The contest will be decided by Lee and the army of Northern Virginia,” an editorial in the *Richmond Examiner* declared late that summer. “If we make sure of the issue on this theatre we secure it for the whole Confederacy.”<sup>33</sup> A Georgia lieutenant agreed, calling his army “the last hope of the South” and predicting that it, “to say nothing of what may be done elsewhere, will sooner or later by its own unaided power win the independence of the Confederacy.”<sup>34</sup> As optimism and determination were replaced by doubt and despair by the fall of 1864 and through the winter of 1864-65, however, it became increasingly apparent that the dying Confederacy was asking more of Lee and his army than either of them could bear.

By the end of the year many members of the army now began to question the wisdom, or even the necessity, of continuing to oppose the vast Federal armies facing them. As one North Carolina veteran put it, “a good many say the Confederacy has ‘gone up’ . . . and that we are whipped. I have never seen the men so discouraged before.”<sup>35</sup> While numerous Confederates expressed such fears in their letters and diaries, hundreds of others discussed them in conversations in camp or on the march. Still others kept to themselves, saying little or nothing about the war and its possible outcome. Most soldiers were simply weary of fighting Yankees. It became more and more difficult for many of Lee’s officers and men to endure personal sacrifices or accept enormous losses in Southern lives and property when they had no assurance that anything good would ever come of it. One young Georgian spoke for many of his comrades when he admitted gloomily, “I Wish this War would come to a Close and I dont care how all I want is

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<sup>31</sup> Lee to Davis, 23 May 1864, Douglas Southall Freeman, ed., *Lee’s Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A., to Jefferson Davis and the War Department of the Confederate States of America, 1862-65, from the Private Collection of Wymberly Jones de Renne, of Wormsloe, Georgia* (New York: 1915; reprint ed., New York: Putnam, 1957), 195; “Ivanhoe,” 19 May 1864, *Richmond Examiner* (Richmond, VA.), 23 May 1864.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Minor Blackford to his wife, 18 June 1864, Blackford, comp., and Blackford, ed., *Letters from Lee’s Army*, p. 257.

<sup>33</sup> *Richmond Examiner* (Richmond, VA), 12 September 1864.

<sup>34</sup> Ezekiel D. Graham to Miss Laura Mann, 14 September 1864, Typescripts of Georgia Confederate Letters, Diaries, and Reminiscences by the Georgia Division, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, GA, II:311.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Raleigh Battle to his mother, 15 January 1865, Laura Elizabeth Lee, ed., *Forget-Me-Nots of the Civil War: A Romance, Containing Reminiscences and Original Letters of Two Confederate Soldiers* (St. Louis: MO: Press A. R. Fleming Printing, 1909), 125.

Peace.”<sup>36</sup> Another veteran wrote, “We have no army worth a sent except ours & that can’t whip the world.”<sup>37</sup>

When the end came, it came swiftly. “Be prepared for bad news from Lee’s army,” a North Carolina colonel warned his wife the day before the Army of the Potomac broke through the Confederate lines at Petersburg and forced the Army of Northern Virginia on its final retreat. “There is no reasonable prospect of good news.”<sup>38</sup> Most Southerners, whether soldiers or civilians, knew the army’s surrender at Appomattox extinguished the last flickering hopes of Confederate independence. “The life of the C.S.’ is gon’ when Gen Lee and his army surrendered,” one veteran observed in his diary.<sup>39</sup> “It was a crushing blow,” a South Carolina woman wrote soon afterward, “and I wept as if I had lost a dearly loved friend, not violently, but as if stunned by the shock.”<sup>40</sup>

If most white Southerners spent the immediate postwar years more focused on the future and the new world in which they found themselves than on the war they had just lost, as time passed they began to view their cause and their leading general with even more awe and reverence than they undoubtedly had during the war or before Lee’s death.<sup>41</sup> “It is not likely that any biographer or historian will ever portray him as he seemed to those who served by his side and knew him best,” a review of John Esten Cooke’s 1871 biography observed.<sup>42</sup> Devotion to Lee and his men manifested itself in many profound, and hundreds more not-so-profound, ways in the postwar South of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dixon Wecter explains, “The South lost the war, but she still had Robert E. Lee.”<sup>43</sup>

The political, social, and economic changes wrought throughout the region by the war and its aftermath, furthermore, convinced many Confederate veterans, their families, and most of their fellow white Southerners that their association with Lee was the high point of their lives. As Douglas Southall Freeman has observed, Lee’s soldiers believed that his fame—not just in the South, and not just in America, but worldwide—was a

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<sup>36</sup> John A. Everett to his mother, 29 December 1864, John A. Everett Papers, GEU.

<sup>37</sup> Anonymous Virginian to his wife, January 1865, in Hill Jordan, James I. Robertson, Jr., and J.H. Segars, eds., *The Bell Irvin Wiley Reader* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 2001), 141.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel Hoey Walkup to his wife, 30 March & 1 April 1865, Samuel Hoey Walkup Papers, NcU.

<sup>39</sup> William D. Alexander Diary, 9 April 1865, William D. Alexander Papers, NcU.

<sup>40</sup> Emma Holmes Diary, 7-21 April 1865, John F. Marszalek, ed., *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes 1861-1866* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 435.

<sup>41</sup> “Tributes to General Lee,” *The Southern Magazine* 8:1 (January 1871), 1-46, is a useful collection of memorial addresses and other appreciations of Lee immediately after his death.

<sup>42</sup> Francis C. Lawley, “General Lee,” *Edinburgh’s Magazine* 111, no. 677 (March 1872), reprinted in Gallagher, ed., *Lee the Soldier* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 83.

<sup>43</sup> Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship* (New York: Scribner’s, 1941), 284.



“tribute to the humblest soldier who had helped to win his battles,” and they were proud to count themselves among them.<sup>44</sup>

Former officers and enlisted men described the bond between the general and his soldiers, and the way it manifested itself in battle, in speeches, in unit histories, and in their memoirs. From Reconstruction to well into the twentieth century, for a period of more than fifty years, Lee’s veterans published books about their experiences. The years just after the turn of the twentieth century were a golden age for Civil War and Confederate memoirs in general, and memoirs from the Army of Northern Virginia in particular. Lee’s veterans also published dozens of articles in the *Southern Historical Society Papers* or *Confederate Veteran* between 1876 and 1932.<sup>45</sup> Most biographies of Lee, furthermore, quoted or paraphrased the views of his veterans and other contemporaries.<sup>46</sup>

Douglas Southall Freeman, with his meticulous research and vigorous prose, played a pivotal role in shaping the historiography and reinforcing the legend of Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. Almost eighty years after *R.E. Lee* won the Pulitzer Prize for biography and almost seventy years after *Lee’s Lieutenants* gave us vivid portraits of

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<sup>44</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *The South to Posterity: An Introduction to the Writing of Confederate History* (New York: Scribner’s, 1939), 59.

<sup>45</sup> See, for representative examples, George Cary Eggleston, *A Rebel’s Recollections* (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1875); J. William Jones, *Personal Reminiscences, Anecdotes, and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (New York: D. Appleton, 1874) and “The Morale of General Lee’s Army,” in Alexander McClure, ed., *The Annals of the War Written by Leading Participants North and South. Originally Published in the Philadelphia Weekly Times* (Philadelphia: Times Publishing, 1879), 191-204; Carlton McCarthy, *Detailed Minutiae of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia 1861-1865* (Richmond, VA: Carlton McCarthy, 1882); Archer Anderson, “Robert Edward Lee: An Address Delivered at the Dedication of the Lee Monument,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 17 (1889): 312-35; Robert Stiles, *Four Years Under Marse Robert* (New York: Neal Publishing, 1903); and John H. Worsham, *One of Jackson’s Foot Cavalry* (New York: Neal Publishing, 1912). Pharris Deloach Johnson, ed., *Under the Southern Cross: Soldier Life with Gordon Bradwell and the Army of Northern Virginia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999) is a useful collection of seventy-three articles published in *Confederate Veteran* between 1907 and 1932.

<sup>46</sup> See, for representative examples, John Esten Cooke, *A Life of General Robert E. Lee* (New York: D. Appleton, 1871) and “The Personal Character of General Lee,” *Appleton’s Journal* 13:303 (9 January 1875), 47-50; Fitzhugh Lee, *General Lee* (New York: D. Appleton, 1894); Henry Alexander White, *Robert E. Lee and the Southern Confederacy* (New York: G.P. Putnum’s Sons, 1897); Henry E. Shepherd, *Life of Robert Edward Lee* (New York and Washington DC: Neale Publishing, 1906); Thomas Nelson Page, *Robert E. Lee the Southerner* (New York: Scribner’s, 1908), and his revised and expanded version *Robert E. Lee: Man and Soldier* (New York: Scribner’s, 1911); Gamaliel Bradford, “Lee and His Army,” *Atlantic Monthly* 108 (July 1911), 83-93, and *Lee the American* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1912; revised edition, 1929); James C. Young, *Marse Robert: Knight of the Confederacy* (New York: Rae D. Henkle, 1929); William E. Brooks, *Lee of Virginia* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1932); and Robert W. Winston, *Robert E. Lee: A Biography* (New York: William Morrow, 1934).

Stonewall Jackson, James Longstreet, Jeb Stuart, and a host of other generals, it is still impossible to write about either General Lee or his army without Freeman's formidable presence looming in the shadows.<sup>47</sup>

From Freeman's day since, historians have retold the story of Lee and his soldiers achieving great things against even greater odds but have not yet explained just how they did so.<sup>48</sup> In the fifty years since the Civil War Centennial began numerous historians have vigorously criticized Lee's generalship and minimized his wartime stature and influence, claiming that his military genius was exaggerated and his that lofty reputation was created only after his death.<sup>49</sup> Other historians and writers have repeated that claim

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<sup>47</sup> Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 4 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1934) and *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 3 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1942-44). The first published book-length biography of Freeman is David E. Johnson's superb *Douglas Southall Freeman* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2002). For an early criticism of Freeman's scholarship, see T. Harry Williams, "Freeman, Historian of the Civil War: An Appraisal," *Journal of Southern History* 21:1 (February 1955), 91-100, and the reply by Joseph Harrison, Jr., "Harry Williams, Critic of Freeman: A Demurrer," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 64:1 (January 1956), 70-77. Thomas L. Connelly's article "Robert E. Lee and the Western Confederacy: A Criticism of Lee's Strategic Ability," and Albert Castel's rejoinder "The Historian and the General: Thomas L. Connelly versus Robert E. Lee" appeared in *Civil War History* in 1969. This exchange was followed by Connelly's article "The Image and the General: Robert E. Lee in American Historiography," *Civil War History* 19:2 (March 1973), 50-64, and by his book *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (New York: Random House, 1977), the first significant sustained examination of Lee's wartime and postwar image and an ambitious, yet in many ways unconvincing, critique of his generalship and character. Connelly's original article and Castel's reply have been reprinted in Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *Lee the Soldier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 189-207 and 209-23.

<sup>48</sup> See, for representative examples, Burke Davis, *Gray Fox: Robert E. Lee and the Civil War* (New York: Rinehart, 1956); Earl Schenck Miers, *Robert E. Lee: A Great Life in Brief* (New York: Knopf, 1956); Clifford Dowdey, *Death of a Nation: The Story of Lee and His Men at Gettysburg* (New York: Knopf, 1958); Clifford Dowdey, *Lee's Last Campaign: The Story of Lee and his Men against Grant, 1864* (Boston: Little Brown, 1960); Clifford Dowdey, *The Seven Days: The Emergence of Lee* (Boston: Little Brown, 1964); Clifford Dowdey, *Lee* (Boston: Little Brown, 1965); and Margaret Sanborn, *Robert E. Lee: A Portrait, 1807-1861* and *Robert E. Lee: The Complete Man, 1861-1870*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1966-67).

<sup>49</sup> Lee's most persistent and most strident critics acknowledge that he shared a special bond with his men but often do so very reluctantly, minimizing its significance. See also—in addition to the sources critical of Lee cited in note 47 above—Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows, *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), a more nuanced and credible view than Connelly's *The Marble Man*, and Alan T. Nolan's bold but deeply flawed *Lee Considered: General Robert E. Lee and Civil War History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), and his contentious essay "The Anatomy of the Myth," in Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) is a valuable view of the Lost Cause.

over and over, and many people now assume that it must be the truth. No single observation about Lee and his men could be more wrong.

Several other important books, essays, and articles have appeared in the last twenty-five years. They range from biographies of Lee to studies of his army, their campaigns and battles, or the Confederate experience. Whether these studies agree with previous interpretations, challenge them, or do both, many of them are just as significant for the new directions they suggest and the new questions they raise.<sup>50</sup>

Fifty-five years after the war an aging veteran exclaimed in his memoirs that despite the army's defeat "its glory has not died, and the splendor of its deeds has not, and will not grow dim. . . . Of that army, I had, thank God! the honor to be a soldier."<sup>51</sup> That impassioned memory notwithstanding, the best way to view the relationship between Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia is through his and their eyes, while that army was still a living institution with a future and a purpose rather than a memory, a legend, or a myth tied to a Lost Cause.

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<sup>50</sup> Significant books, essays, and articles of the last twenty years include Emory M. Thomas, *Robert E. Lee: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995); Charles P. Roland, *Reflections on Lee: A Historian's Assessment* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1995); Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Gary W. Gallagher, "The Idol of His Soldiers and the Hope of His Country: Lee and the Confederate People," in Gallagher, ed., *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Michael Fellman, *The Making of Robert E. Lee* (New York: Random House, 2000); Gallagher, *Lee and His Army in Confederate History*; Richard B. McCaslin, *Lee in the Shadow of Washington, Conflicting Worlds: New Dimensions of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001); Blount, *Robert E. Lee*; Peter S. Carmichael, ed., *Audacity Personified: The Generalship of Robert E. Lee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Gary W. Gallagher, "'A Great General Is So Rare': Robert E. Lee and the Confederacy," in Gallagher and Joseph T. Glatthaar, eds., *Leaders of the Lost Cause: New Perspectives on the Confederate High Command* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2004); four essays in Peter Wallenstein and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, eds., *Virginia's Civil War* (Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press, 2005); Emory M. Thomas, "The Malleable Man: Robert E. Lee in the American Mind;" Michael Fellman, "Robert E. Lee: Myth and Man;" Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Robert E. Lee and the Concept of Honor;" and Charles Joyner, "A Man of Constant Sorrow: The Enduring Enigma of Robert E. Lee;" Elizabeth Brown Pryor, *Reading The Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee Through His Private Letters* (New York: Viking, 2007); Brian Holden Reid, *Robert E. Lee: Icon for a Nation* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, , 2005); Joseph T. Glatthaar, *General Lee's Army: From Victory To Collapse* (New York: Free Press, 2008); Ethan S. Rafuse, *Robert E. Lee and the Fall of the Confederacy 1863-1865* (United States: Roman & Littlefield 2008); Noah Andre Trudeau, *Robert E. Lee: Lessons in Leadership* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Soldiering in the Army of Northern Virginia: A Statistical Portrait of the Troops Who Served under Robert E. Lee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); and Jeffry D. Wert, *A Glorious Army: Robert E. Lee's Triumph 1862-1863* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> William Meade Dame, *From the Rapidan to Richmond and the Spotsylvania Campaign: A Sketch in Personal Narrative of the Scenes a Soldier Saw* (Baltimore: Breen-Lucas, 1920), 5-6.

The army's history, and significance, cannot be reduced to some inevitably charted timeline or graph from the Seven Days to Chancellorsville, then from Gettysburg to Appomattox. It can only be understood as the war unfolded, day by week by month by year, without anyone in it knowing how it would end. The letters, diaries, and other wartime papers of Lee and his soldiers can lead us in new directions and encourage us to ask new questions about their relationship as something central to the Confederate experience. Doing so will allow us to test—and, in the case of this general and this army, almost certainly confirm—John Keegan's observation that "the personal bond between leader and follower lies at the root of all explanations of what does and what does not happen in battle."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Viking, 1976), 114.