



V. Robert E. Lee

Robert Edward Lee (January 19, 1807 – October 12, 1870) was an American career military officer and education administrator who is best known for having commanded the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia in the American Civil War.

The son of Revolutionary War officer Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee III and a top graduate of the United States Military Academy, Robert E. Lee distinguished himself as an exceptional officer and combat engineer in the United States Army for 32 years. During this time, he served throughout the United States, distinguished himself during the Mexican-American War, served as Superintendent of the United States Military Academy, and married Mary Custis (the step grand-daughter of President George Washington).

When Virginia declared its secession from the Union in April 1861, Lee chose to follow his home state, despite his personal desire for the country to remain intact and despite the fact that President Abraham Lincoln had offered Lee command of a Union Army.[1] During the Civil War, Lee originally served as a senior military adviser to President Jefferson Davis. He soon emerged as a shrewd tactician and battlefield commander, winning numerous battles against far superior Union armies. His abilities as a tactician have been praised by many military historians. Lee's strategic foresight was more doubtful, and both of his major offensives into the North ended in defeat. Lee's aggressive tactics during the war that resulted in high casualties, when the Confederacy had a shortage of manpower, has recently drawn criticism. Union General Ulysses S. Grant's campaigns bore down on the Confederacy in 1864 and 1865, and despite inflicting heavy casualties, Lee was unable to turn the war's tide. He would ultimately surrender to Grant at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865. By this time, the former had assumed supreme command of the remaining Southern armies; other Confederate forces swiftly capitulated after Lee's surrender. Lee rejected the proposal of a sustained insurgency against the North and called for reconciliation between the two sides.

After the war, as President of what is now Washington and Lee University, Lee supported President Andrew Johnson's program of Reconstruction and intersectional friendship, while opposing the Radical Republican proposals to give freed slaves the vote and take the vote away from ex-Confederates. He urged them to rethink their position between the North and the South, and the reintegration of former Confederates into the nation's political life. Lee became the great Southern hero of the War, a postwar icon of the "Lost Cause of the Confederacy" to some. But his popularity grew even in the North, especially after his death in 1870. He remains one of the most revered, iconic figures of American military leadership