

ROBERT E. LEE: CHARACTER-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

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fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

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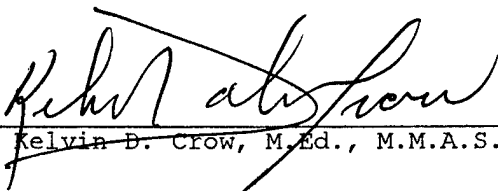
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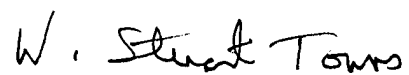
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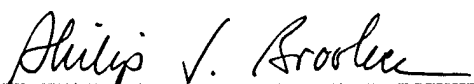
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#### ABSTRACT

ROBERT E. LEE, CHARACTER-CENTERED LEADERSHIP BY MAJ Raymond L. Naworol,  
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This study examines what influences in Robert E. Lee's early life helped form his moral character. It seeks to determine what character qualities he possessed then that may have influenced his future military service and subsequently serve to inspire his future Army, the men who fought under him, and his new Nation.

The study begins with the establishment of Lee's greatness as a military leader by relating what others have said of him prior to and after the Civil War. Next it reviews and documents instances where Lee either stated or demonstrated his moral leadership traits beginning with his years as a student at West Point, and it continues this analysis through his formative years to his birth. Throughout, this study considers the impact of his family, society, civil schooling, religion, and West Point schooling on his moral growth.

Moral character in leaders is recognized as an important ingredient to winning on the battlefield. This study seeks to validate the Army's current moral training strategy because strong character-centered leadership remains as a key fundamental principle to effective military leadership today.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

War must be carried on systematically, and to do it you must have men of character activated by principles of honor.<sup>1</sup>

General George Washington, Guideposts for a Proud and Ready Army

It is my opinion, based on my research, that if George Washington were alive and commanding America's Army today, he would once more speak these words. However, Washington would likely use General Robert E. Lee as his example of the kind of leader who possessed the virtues that he would contend are necessary to lead our Army and to move our Nation. My purpose for this study is to determine what influences in General Lee's early life helped form the kind of moral virtues that may have subsequently served to inspire his future Army and the nation that supported him.

#### The Problem Setting

Although technological advancements since the days George Washington was Commander-in-Chief have significantly changed the weapons and the way we fight wars and battles today, the effects of the human dimension on the battlefield remains unchanged since Washington led the Continental Army. The one human trait that remains unchanged in battle since Washington's time is the same one which early nineteenth-century military theorist Carl von Clausewitz expressed as being necessary to

prevent the intellect from becoming unbalanced by powerful emotions--  
strong character.<sup>2</sup>

Since the days of General Washington, senior Army leaders have always recognized the necessity of promoting character and ethical development in junior leaders. In March of 1985, General John A. Wickham, a former Chief of Staff of the Army, gave the following reasons why he feels ethical leadership remains important:

As in the past, our service must rest upon a solid ethical base, because those who discharge such moral responsibilities must uphold and abide by the highest standards of behavior. That ethical base is the cornerstone of our Army because it governs the faith that our subordinates have in our leadership, because it governs the support and resources that our citizens are willing to entrust to our stewardship, and ultimately because it governs our human capacity to prevail on the battlefield. In time of danger, it is the ethical element of leadership which will bond our units together and enable them to withstand the stresses of combat. . . . There must be no doubt about the fundamental importance of army ethics to our nation and to our institution.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, General Frederick M. Franks, commander of the Seventh Corps during the Gulf War and present Commander of the Army Training and Doctrine Command, supported General Wickham's premise regarding leadership and strong character. General Franks explained that strong character remains an important requisite in today's Army leaders. He used his personal experience during Desert Shield and Desert Storm to share his views about leaders who possessed this important personal quality:

Character counts as much as intellect, and it shows up on the battlefield. Leaders are character! Values are absent when we first start our careers but are seen and felt as we grow as soldiers. When one of my soldiers . . . told me "don't worry general, we trust you" prior to the start of ground operations . . . he demonstrated the basic bond of leadership. . . . Trust and character, honor and bonding are important in war with soldiers and with our civilian population . . . to win.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to understand that as a combat veteran of Vietnam and the Gulf war, General Franks believes that certain character values are lacking in junior leaders when they first start their Army careers. However, his experience also recognizes that as junior leaders grow in the Army organization they build their technical and tactical proficiency base, and they develop their character ethic from quality training and quality leadership.

To assist in developing moral character in its junior leaders, the Army provides Army leaders and commanders with prescribed ethical doctrine found in three Army Field manuals. These manuals describe senior leadership training roles, responsibilities, and functions as established by the Constitution, Congress, and the Department of Defense. These Army Field Manuals (FMs): FM 100-5, Operations; FM 22-103, Leadership and Command at Senior Levels; and FM 100-1, The Army, are the guides that govern senior leaders in the ethical development of their subordinates. In short, these manuals define leadership as the most essential dynamic of combat power.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the documents describe the role and moral responsibility of senior leaders in developing an ethical climate and moral responsibility in those they lead. Finally, these FMs tie the actions of today's leaders to those ascribed to by the Founding Fathers by relating the conduct of current leaders to the governing virtues found in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Army training and role modeling are the key vehicles by which Army senior leaders can influence ethical development and behavior advancement. Historically, the training of soldiers in the Army occurs

in three forums. First, training takes place in Army schools where soldiers receive institutionalized instruction and training. Second, it occurs in units where leaders build and expand on institutional training. Third, it occurs by professional self study through formalized education, military correspondence, and personal study of military history. Of the three, unit training is the forum in which leaders will have the greatest impact on the character of subordinates. Ethical development and behavior improvement happens best when leaders promote ethical advancement in their units by setting the example and by teaching soldiers to reason clearly about ethical matters. Moreover, when it comes to ethical or character development in the Army, it is generally understood that an effective teaching technique is to present ethical experiences so that they are caught rather than taught. Many leaders in the Army subscribe to the following practice when it comes to ethical training of junior leaders:

Ethics and values are more "caught" than "taught." They are "caught" by young soldiers from their leaders and their peers, from the ethical climate that exists in their squads, platoons, and companies. They are "caught" by West Point and ROTC cadets and OCS candidates. They are "caught" by children in families where moral values are lived day in and day out.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, Aristotle, who taught ethical theories over 2,000 years ago, many of which remain valid today, would take serious issue with the Army concept that soldiers "caught" values from their leaders. He taught that moral virtues are a result of habit and that they are more easily inculcated through informal education very early in life. He maintained that there were two kinds of virtue, intellectual and moral. Further, he described intellectual virtue as owing its birth and growth to teaching and learning. Additionally, he taught that moral

virtue was a result of habit and practice, hence its name "ethike" which is formed from a variation of ethos (habit).<sup>7</sup> Aristotle also noted that virtue was a state of character concerned with choice and that "it has grown up with us all from our infancy; this is why it is difficult to rub off this passion, ingrained as it is in our life."<sup>8</sup> If what Aristotle taught remains true today, then the method which the Army currently uses to instill ethical virtues in its junior leaders may be very inadequate. Therefore, I will use Aristotle's premises on ethos to ascertain an answer to the primary question raised in this study.

Throughout this study, I have determined that great U.S. Army leaders of the past and present believe that strong character is important in military leaders. It is important because military leaders make decisions that involve the risk of life and the Nation's treasures in peace and in time of war. Clausewitz explained character this way:

A man has strength of character, or simply has character, if he sticks to his convictions, whether these derive from his own opinions or someone else's, whether they represent principles, attitudes, sudden insights, or any other mental force. Such firmness cannot show itself, of course, if a man keeps changing his mind.<sup>9</sup>

Our nation and those we lead deserve leaders who are consistent in doing the right things out of habit and can always be counted on to act and lead reliably. If George Washington were here today, he would likely choose Robert E. Lee as his example of what he meant by having men of character activated by principles of honor to lead our Army and Nation. General Lee's disciplined character ethic was a significant portion of his greatness as a military leader before and during the Civil War, and it proved to be even more significant through his subsequent actions after the War in leading the south back into the

Union. For this reason, the primary question I seek to answer in this study is how and when strong character is developed. My contention is that Aristotle's childhood development premise is key to ethical character development. Accordingly, I will use Aristotle's premise that moral virtue results from habit and is learned early in life to answer the primary research question which is: What influences in Robert E. Lee's early life helped form his moral character?

#### Importance of The Research

It is my view that the character qualities required of senior Army leaders today remain the same as those stipulated by General George Washington in his role as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. Furthermore, knowledge of the virtues that Washington spoke of were not new and held only by him, but the very same attributes were inculcated in and exhibited by the statesmen who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the men who signed it. For example, an understanding of the ethical makeup of those men who signed that document then is more easily understood by comprehending what they were willing to give up for what they held as right and just. The signers of the Declaration believed so strongly in its "truths" that they pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to defend those values. More importantly, the character of these men was held to be of such distinction that they ranked their "honor" as sacred and as consequential as their fortunes and their lives. These men actually pledged not to do their duty and remain loyal to their government; instead, they chose to "alter their former system of government" and to

"dissolve the political bands which have connected them with . . . the King of Great Britain."<sup>10</sup>

The moral character ethic of all who led this nation in its earliest and most fragile moments is an unmeasured moral side of the human dimension that created our Nation. This moral standard remains in the Declaration of Independence as a lighthouse beacon on a dark and stormy night to guide our Army leaders and America's actions; all that is required is a means to use that powerful ethical statement to measure how our Army is developing those moral codes in today's leaders; for if we as an Army and a Nation want to survive, these moral codes must be inculcated in today's Army and National leaders as they were in the Founding Fathers.

It is my opinion that from the time of George Washington to the present, military men of character who were moved by principles of honor have fought and won our nation's wars and battles. In America's Civil War, the North and the South both had men who exhibited these leadership qualities, and both had military leaders who were moved by moral "absolutes," yet the south lost. As General George Washington remains the single most significant military figure in America's successful War for Independence, General Robert E. Lee remains the single most significant military figure for the South's unsuccessful cause in the war between the States. And as did General Washington, General Robert E. Lee demonstrated his character through his moral ascendancy over the many leaders he faced who commanded the opposing northern Army.

Today, the professional Army ethic embraces the ideals and values that flow from the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of

Confederation, and the Constitution. There are many lessons to be learned from studying these documents and in particular, the beliefs and character ethic of the Founding Fathers involved with these historic documents. It is my belief that if our current civilian and military leaders are to "hold the proper course" set for America by the principles held within these documents, and to win America's battles in our future, it will be important for our military leaders to have and exhibit character traits that will move military men and women and the Nation to action--character traits that are not unlike those of General Robert E. Lee.

My study is important because in documenting how and if Lee's character traits were influenced early in his life, it will provide insight into the following key areas: It will provide evidence as to how and when moral character may be developed; it will register support for historical teachings and theories of character and ethos by Aristotle and Clausewitz with respect to current Army precepts that military character is the result of duty (ethos) and that it will result more from being caught rather than formally taught; it will provide insight into the ways Lee acquired the inspirational leadership that made him famous; it will provide an interpretation of an assertion made in FM 100-1 that the guiding beliefs, standards, and ideals that characterize and motivate the Army are now described by the one Army ethos word--DUTY;<sup>11</sup> it will add to the Army's knowledge and understanding of the Civil War and General Lee's nature and role in the war; finally, through the information attained from this study, I hope to provide present and future Army leaders with insight and knowledge

that may assist them to train and lead others in the manner of Robert E. Lee.

### Background of the Problem

General Robert E. Lee remains a Civil War hero and is recognized as one of the greatest military leaders in all history.<sup>12</sup> Lee became a military hero and captivated the entire Confederacy not only for his accomplishments but also because of what he represented. He lost at Gettysburg, and in the end, he lost the war. However, despite his tremendous military defeats, he retained the love and admiration of those close to him, from soldiers of all ranks on both sides of the conflict, to the civilian populace in the North as well as in the South. General Lee was a man of character and of military honor; he exhibited virtue and gentleman-like qualities that endeared him to all who knew him or were touched by his spirit. Lee possessed qualities that inspired those around him to great achievement; he inspired and empowered people because of his character ethic and professional qualities. Today, it is my sense that the legacy of General Lee continues, perhaps because he exhibited character qualities that almost all of us admire and want to identify in those we elect to lead us.

This study looks at General Lee's early life through the end of his collegiate years at West Point to determine what character qualities he possessed then that may have influenced his future military service and subsequently served to inspire his future Army, the men who fought under him, and his new Nation. It looks at the influence of his family, early education, and his education at West Point as components in the development of his unique leadership qualities. Using four fundamental

values as a starting point, i.e., integrity, personal responsibility, commitment, and courage, this paper will review historical literature on Lee's early life through his college years at West Point to determine how and when he developed his strong ethical base which stood the stresses of combat during the Civil War.

#### Research Questions

The primary question asks: What influences in Robert E. Lee's early life helped form his moral character?

Secondary questions include:

1. When was Lee's moral base developed?
2. How was Lee's moral code developed?
3. How did Lee's family and community affect his character development?
4. Did Lee's West Point training have anything to do with his character development?

#### Delimitations

This study looks at influences that directly affected Lee's character. Since there is no direct evidence of anyone from the Lee lineage who may have directly influenced Robert in his early years, this work will include only the influence exhibited by his father. However, the influences from Lee's mother's family were considerable. The Carter family was large enough to maintain two separate Carter schools where Robert was educated until he was thirteen. In the family run school for boys, Robert gained a significant and undetermined amount of Carter moral and ethical influence. There were both indirect influence from his wealthy and ethical grandfather, Richard Carter, and direct

influence from his many uncles and aunts and literally hundreds of cousins. This work will include only the influence of Robert's mother. Finally, because of my experience, education, and one year of study at the Command and General Staff College, much of this study will reflect use of historical material available at this college and will not embody documentation from the Library of Congress and other notable institutions that retain much of the original Lee documentation.

#### Limitations

This study looks at Robert E. Lee as a senior military leader from the past; the results will give insight into his character development as interpreted by the author. Moreover, I have not discovered a formal study on General Lee relating to his character development, and because many of my assertions cannot be proved through documented observation of Lee, they will be seen as inferences drawn from examples of Lee's known character training. Finally, as I began this study, one of the first things I realized was that Lee was raised in a manner that was in accordance with the practical moral living standards that Benjamin Franklin expressed in his Autobiography. Franklin seemed to embody the "Spirit of the Age." I cannot help to think that Franklin's living philosophy would have been the philosophy of the age in which Robert grew to maturation. His book Poor Richard's Almanac was popular while Robert was in his youth; it was filled with wisdom, practical moral living standards, and classical learning philosophies. Although I found no direct evidence of any Franklin influence on Lee early in his formative years, I believe Franklin's plan for attaining moral perfection presents standards that were similar to

those in which Robert was raised and require further research which I allude to at the end of Chapter Four.

#### Assumptions

This study makes three main assumptions. The first assumes Robert E. Lee's greatness and accomplishments during and after the Civil War were largely the result of his character and its effect on those he influenced. The second assumption is that General Lee's virtues enhanced his abilities as a man and commander. The third assumption maintains that insight into Lee's character qualities will provide a contribution to today's Army leadership teaching and training methods.

#### Terms

There are numerous key terms and phrases in this document that require a clear definition to fully understand how they are defined in today's Army and in the historical references.

Integrity. Integrity is an uncompromising adherence to a code of moral values. It shows in one's utter sincerity and in avoidance of deception or expediency of any kind.<sup>13</sup>

Personal responsibility. Personal responsibility connotes the obligation to accomplish assigned tasks to the fullest of one's abilities and to abide by all commitments.<sup>14</sup>

Commitment. Commitment is a pledge to achieve some purpose larger than oneself.<sup>15</sup>

Courage. Courage is the professional quality that includes a physical and spiritual dimension. Physical courage allows one to accomplish what seems impossible, while moral courage allows one to

stand for what is right even when it is contrary to what others believe.<sup>16</sup>

Aristotle's Ethos. Aristotle's ethos refers to moral virtues resulting from habit. Further, Aristotle taught that no moral virtue would arise in man unless habit (ethos) was practiced.<sup>17</sup>

Army's Ethos. FM 100-1 depicts the Army ethos as "guiding beliefs, standards and ideas that characterize and motivate the Army."<sup>18</sup> Additionally, this document also describes the Army ethos as being composed of one word, duty--which includes integrity and selfless service.

Temperament. Clausewitz recognized temperament as qualities of determination, firmness, staunchness, and strength of character.<sup>19</sup>

Character. Clausewitz described character as being entrenched in temperament which is a gift of balance that allows one to remain calm under great stress and assures the dominance of the intellect.<sup>20</sup> Aristotle described character as "behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances. . . . Thus in one word, states of character arise out of like activities."<sup>21</sup> He further explained that "it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference" to form character in a child's youth.<sup>22</sup> For the purpose of this paper, the definition of character is acting morally and responsibly even under the most difficult of circumstances.

Virtue(s). Virtue is described by Aristotle as being one of two kinds, intellectual and moral. Intellectual virtue results from teaching and learning. Moral virtue results from habit and is about making decisions. The result of an ethical decision then is right or

wrong behavior base upon certain standards of conduct formed by moral virtues and guiding principles. He gives many examples two of which are noted here: our ethics allow us to choose to do just or unjust acts in our transactions with others, and because of habituation when we feel fear or confidence, we either choose to be cowardly or brave in the presence of danger.<sup>23</sup> For the purpose of this paper, virtue means exhibiting the kind of behavior that always chooses to achieve the right outcomes.

Taught. Imparted or conveyed knowledge of; given instruction or lessons in (a subject), made known, delivered (a message).<sup>24</sup>

Caught. Apprehended by the senses of intellect; heard, seen, etc., by an effort; succeeded in hearing, seeing, understanding, etc..<sup>25</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This section of Chapter One describes the methodology used to explore the thesis question: What influences in Robert E. Lee's early life helped form his character? Additionally, the methodology explores answers to the following secondary research questions:

1. Was Lee's moral character base evident early in life?
2. Was there a conscious effort to develop Lee's moral character codes?
3. How did Lee's family and community influence his character development?
4. Did Lee's West Point collegiate training influence his character development?

### Specific Aspects of the Methodology

The research methodology of this paper is sequenced into four principal parts. Chapter One introduces the problem, explains why new work on character development in the Army is important, provides specific background evidence that supports the study of Robert E. Lee as his early life relates to moral character development, describes the research methodology that is used to determine the answers to the primary and secondary questions of the study, and specifies constraints that exist within the study. Chapter Two reviews literature written about Lee by three classes of authors: first, those who knew him personally as members of his family, as members of his military staff during the Civil War, or as close friends of the family; second, authors who were born shortly after Lee's death and were able to obtain information on Lee through interviews with people who knew Lee and could provide personal knowledge of him; finally, those modern authors who have provided a contemporary view of Lee. Chapter Three uses the literature review to analyze and discuss the four fundamental character values of integrity, personal responsibility, commitment and courage that Lee either stated, exhibited or demonstrated from his formative years through his graduation from West Point. Chapter Four concludes the research by summarizing the implications of the study, drawing conclusions, and making recommendations.

### Fundamental Character Values

Formative years in developing Lee's character traits.

1. Family development:

(a) Integrity. How did his mother and father develop Lee's uncompromising adherence to a moral code of values, sincerity, and an avoidance of deception or expediency?

(b) Personal responsibility. Was he taught personal responsibility for his actions and deeds?

(c) Commitment. Did his parents teach the necessity of purpose in his life, and that it should be larger than himself?

(d) Courage. How did his parents teach physical and spiritual motivation?

## 2. Society's impact:

(a) Integrity. Did those in society impact on Lee to instill an uncompromising adherence to a moral code of values, sincerity, and an avoidance of deception or expediency?

(b) Personal responsibility. Who were the role models in society while Lee was growing up?

(c) Commitment. Was there a Robert E. Lee hero in society who may have indirectly influenced his sense of being committed to ideas that were larger than himself?

(d) Courage. Were there physically and spiritually motivated leaders in society during Lee's early years?

## 3. Civil Schooling:

(a) Integrity. Was Lee taught an uncompromising adherence to a moral code of values, sincerity, and an avoidance of deception or expediency in school?

(b) Personal responsibility. Was he taught to be responsible for his actions and deeds in school?

(c) Commitment. Did his schooling teach purpose in his life, and that it should be larger than himself?

(d) Courage. Did his schooling teach physical and spiritual motivation?

4. Religious influence:

(a) Integrity. Was religion important and how did it develop an uncompromising adherence to a moral code of values, sincerity, and an avoidance of deception or expediency?

(b) Personal responsibility. What role did religion play in teaching responsibility for his actions and deeds?

(c) Commitment. Did religion give Lee purpose in his life, and was that purpose taught or learned to be larger than himself?

(d) Courage. Was religion key to his physical and spiritual motivation?

West Point schooling.

1. Classroom training:

(a) Integrity. How did his college years help develop an uncompromising adherence to a moral code of values, sincerity, and an avoidance of deception or expediency?

(b) Personal responsibility. Was he taught to be responsible for his actions and deeds?

(c) Commitment. Was he taught purpose in his life, and that it was to be larger than himself?

(d) Courage. Was he physically and spiritually motivated?

2. Mentors--senior leaders:

(a) Integrity. Did anyone personally influence or help him develop an uncompromising adherence to a moral code of values, sincerity, and an avoidance of deception or expediency?

(b) Personal responsibility. Was Lee mentored to be responsible for his actions and deeds?

(c) Commitment. Did anyone impart purpose in his life, and that it should be larger than himself?

(d) Courage. Did Lee have a mentor who challenged him physically and spiritually?

#### Conclusion

It is my sense that today's senior Army leadership recognizes the importance for developing leaders who possess moral character. They are not alone in this premise. General George Washington, former Chief of Staff of the Army, General John A. Wickham, Jr., and most recent Gulf War Corps Commander, General Frederick M. Franks, all recognize leaders who possess moral character as being an important ingredient to winning on the battlefield. This study looks at the early life of a great military officer, General Robert E. Lee, to determine what influences in his early life helped form his moral character. It seeks to validate the Army's current moral training strategy, and it intends for this knowledge to enhance not only individuals, but entire organizations.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Department of the Army, Guideposts for a Proud and Ready Army (Washington: U.S. Department of the Army, 1 March 1985), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, On War, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New Jersey Press, 1984), 106.

<sup>3</sup>Department of the Army, Guideposts for a Proud and Ready Army, 2.

<sup>4</sup>General Frederick M. Franks, Commander, Training and Doctrine Command, CGSC Student Briefing, Fort Leavenworth, 3 October 1994.

<sup>5</sup>US Army, FM 100-5, Operations, 2-11.

<sup>6</sup>Department of the Army, Guideposts for a Proud and Ready Army, 3.

<sup>7</sup>The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 952, 953, 955.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 955.

<sup>9</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, On War, 107.

<sup>10</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., s.v. "Declaration of Independence [1776]."

<sup>11</sup>FM 100-1, pp. 5, 6. defines duty as the "Behavior required by moral obligation, demanded by custom, or by feelings of rightness." This definition differs from that which Clausewitz maintains will motivate men in battle, he believed passions for honor and fame are the key elements that inspire men to fight and die for a cause. Aristotle would also differ from the Army definition of ethos. He taught that ethos was performing something out of habit. He taught that a virtuous person is one who chooses, because of habituation, to do the right and just act for reasons which are honorable rather than acting from the desire to avoid punishment or from a sense of blind obedience.

<sup>12</sup>Robert E. Lee, (Caption under Lee's Picture at Bell Hall's Hall of Fame): Fort Leavenworth, 1994.

<sup>13</sup>US Army, FM 100-1, The Army, 7.

<sup>14</sup>Department of the Army, Guideposts for a Proud and Ready Army, 2.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>16</sup>US Army, FM 100-1, The Army, 9-10.

<sup>17</sup>The Basic Works of Aristotle, 952.

<sup>18</sup>US Army, FM 100-1, The Army, 5,6.

<sup>19</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, 112.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>21</sup>The Basic Works of Aristotle, 953.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd. ed. (1989).

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### General Introduction

The literature in this study is written by authors who may be divided into three categories: authors who served with or personally knew Lee; authors who were well acquainted with Lee or began to write about him shortly after the time of his death so that information was gathered from those who personally knew Lee; and finally, modern authors who surveyed numerous collections of manuscripts, hundreds of books and articles, and many monographs and pamphlets. In order to gain insight into Lee's character development, I read many books which, in combination, gave me my personal sense of who I believe is the real Robert E. Lee. To me, his biography is a composite of many authors, and as a result, I will cite all the sources that I used in my research as either works cited or works consulted.

Much of the literature examined traced General Lee's genealogy to an ancient and distinguished family in England. Lee's ancestor, Lancelot Lee, fought at the battle of Hastings in 1066, and a later descendant, Lionel Lee, commanded and fought in the third Crusade in 1192.<sup>1</sup> Although Lee knew that he inherited his family traditions and Coat of Arms from ancestors in Shropshire, England, he never mentioned this history in an 1865 letter in response to a question concerning his family ancestors. In that letter he mentioned that he was a "poor

genealogist" and from memory recalled his ancestors to his great-great-grandfather Colonel Richard Lee, who was the first Lee to settle in America.<sup>2</sup> Much is written about Henry Lee and the Lee family involvement in the American Revolution. Since this study looks at influences that directly affected Robert's character development, and because there was no direct evidence of any relatives on his father's side who may have helped to form his moral character, this work will include only those instances where his father directly and indirectly influenced his character development.

However, the same is not true for the influence from his mother's family. There was a significant, but undetermined, amount of character influence exerted on Robert as a child from the wealth and prestige of his grandfather, Richard Carter of the Virginia James River Plantation in Shirley. Ann Hill Carter, Lee's mother, was a daughter of "probably the richest man in Virginia, except George Washington."<sup>3</sup> The influence on Robert came from many Carter family gatherings and his attendance at the Carter family school while he was an impressionable young child (there were literally hundreds of Carter cousins at the two schools). However, this paper will focus only on the direct influence of Lee's mother on his character development.

#### Authors With Personal Knowledge

In his book entitled Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man,<sup>4</sup> the author Reverend J. William Jones qualifies as a primary source author on Lee. He served with him in the Army, and he was one of Lee's chaplains from 1865 to 1870 at Washington College. Jones presents a solid and very favorable record of Lee's lineage,

boyhood, and accounts for his military achievements during the Civil War and civilian accomplishments after the war until his death in 1870. In publishing his work, the author used letters Lee wrote, material written about the general by officers who served under him, including the work by Lee's son, Captain Robert E. Lee, entitled "Recollections of my Father," and many personally collected magazine and news articles. In his work on Lee, the author brings to light the theme of Lee's military genius. He does this by giving many examples of Lee's intellect and integrity, his character and personal discipline, and his religious bearing. The author also offers his first-hand assessment of Lee when he specifically addresses his view of incidents such as those that led to the Gettysburg defeat. He gives many details in explaining why Lee was not to blame, despite the eleven mistakes that were leveled against him by General Longstreet after Lee's death.<sup>5</sup>

In Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee,<sup>6</sup> Lee's son and namesake shares his unique perspective of his famous father's character, spirit, emotions, and the force that supported General Lee in achieving his greatness. The author describes General Lee as he remembers him from his childhood, as a Captain of Engineers, to his recollection of his father as a hero back from the Mexican War, through his years commanding the Army of Northern Virginia, and to the final days before his death. Additionally, the author gives his feelings on why Lee became a supreme figure in the South and how he used his influence to accomplish greater good for the South and the Nation after the war. Moreover, he permits the reader to gain an understanding of Lee's character as it related to his greatness after the war. He does

this by pointing out how General Lee's character allowed him to accept his fate at the war's end and pursue noble objectives: to restore peace without bitterness or hatred against his former enemies.

To present the true Robert E. Lee in his book entitled Marse Robert,<sup>7</sup> James C. Young uses original source material and recollections of a few men who personally knew Lee. The book covers Lee's entire life with the author's expressed intention to seek the truth about Robert E. Lee, the person. The author does this by not dwelling overly long on any one area of Lee's life. He describes key events that centered around Lee, and then the author assesses Lee's greatness by describing the way he affected those events. Finally, the real value of this work is the insight it presents into Lee's character, ideas, qualities of spirit and heart, and the ways he inspired and led his Army.

Lee's former Military Secretary, A. L. Long, wrote Memoirs of Robert E. Lee,<sup>8</sup> and relates his first-hand knowledge of Lee's campaigns. His purpose in writing the book was to present an understanding of Lee's military operations and to give an estimate of Lee's character and military genius.<sup>9</sup> The book concentrated on Lee's involvement and conduct of the Civil War through his death. However, it begins with a brief review of the Lee families of England and Virginia, his early childhood years, then his years at West Point. It also reviews Lee's participation and accomplishments in the Mexican War and his involvement with the Indian uprisings in the West. To ensure accuracy in writing his book, the author used the assistance of many members of the Lee family to assist him in illustrating Lee's traits and character. Additionally, in writing his account of the events that occurred, he

utilized personal notes made while the military events occurred around Lee, and he used the assistance of Colonel C. S. Venable, also of General Lee's staff, to review and present an accurate account of "General Lee's life, actions, and character, and the part played by him in the great events of which he was the ruling spirit."<sup>10</sup>

As General Lee's nephew and cavalry commander, Fitzhugh Lee wrote General Lee,<sup>11</sup> in which he gives General Lee's impressions and opinions of the major Civil War events Lee was associated with: he draws upon his own experience with General Lee and uses actual extracts from his uncle's personal letters. Fitzhugh begins the book with a review of the Lee family ancestry and briefly reviews the events from the General's childhood through West Point. He then recognizes Lee's career leading up to and including the Mexican War. He furnishes details of Lee's bravery and exploits which gained him three brevets from captain to colonel during the Mexican War. The remainder of the book is spent on the Civil War, but it does not go much into battlefield details except for Gettysburg and a few other campaigns. Of importance, the author gives his perspective on the mistakes Lee made at Gettysburg and by those whom he commanded. In his chapter "Military Character," the author compares and contrasts Lee's strategy at Gettysburg to that of Napoleon at Waterloo. In this chapter, he links disobeyed orders by Ney, at Quatre-Bras, to the same behavior of Longstreet at Gettysburg which, the author believed, defeated Lee's well-devised battle plan.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the author gives the reader his analysis of Lee's military genius by explaining Lee's campaigns from the perspective that, although he never had enough men and material resources, his genius enabled the

General and his Army to compensate for the North's excess of men and logistics.

In her book titled Popular Life of Gen. Robert E. Lee,<sup>13</sup> Emily V. Mason presents General Lee as she personally knew him in his youth by her relationship with his mother and the Lee families living in Alexandria, Virginia. She describes not his military genius nor his public life but more of his domestic and private life. Throughout her book, the author uses her personal knowledge, letters from Lee, and writings by those close to him to describe Lee's character qualities. Particularly, she notes those of self-control, work ethic, temperance, temper, kindness, manners, modesty, patience in difficult and disappointing situations, and the noble qualities he exhibited in his surrender at Appomattox Court House.

#### Works by Authors Born the Generation Following Lee's Death

Douglas Southall Freeman published a detailed and thoroughly researched work titled R. E. Lee a Biography,<sup>14</sup> in 1934. The author was born in 1886, early enough to meet many of the people who had known Lee, but late enough for him to gain access to much of the wartime material just being released to scholars. He also held a position as editor of the Richmond newspaper which put him in contact with many of the descendants of the men he wrote about in his book. His position and reputation provided an opportunity for Freeman to procure original documents from private correspondence for his research. The author supports this when he explained that his four-volume 2,377 page biography on Lee was "written from the primary sources"<sup>15</sup> and that he used thousands of letters Lee wrote over a period of forty years.

Freeman's work covers the war years in detail, and it contains 64 photocopied pictures of engravings and many maps. In addition, Freeman accurately researches and presents Lee's ancestry and his childhood years including insights into how Lee's parents raised Robert during these formative years. However, the book lacks sufficient information to understand the ethical impact that West Point may have had on Lee's growth, and it does not provide ample evidence to effectively surmise the effect of society on Lee's character development from his formative years through his days while attending West Point.

In his book Lee of Virginia,<sup>16</sup> Edmund Jennings Lee provides a thorough genealogical account of the families of Lees. He gives an excellent account of the ten principal Lee families in England to Colonel Richard Lee, the first generation Virginian, through the seventh generation of three separate lines of Lees. Much of the book deals with the Stratford line, to which General Robert E. Lee belonged, to the sixth generation. The author reviews Robert's father, Major General Henry Lee, and spends much time describing Henry Lee's involvement in the War of Independence and his close association with George Washington during and after the war. In addition, the author uses 44 pages to describe Robert E. Lee's life from birth to death. Much of his writing avoids the military life of Lee but focuses instead on giving insight into his genius and moral character. The author addresses these issues by giving a brief account of Lee's early life through the end of the war; by giving a close account of Lee's dignity and honor at the war's end; and by describing his accomplishments from the war's end to his death. Moreover, he describes and quotes General Lee in such situations

when he testified before a Congressional committee after the war about his reasons for resigning from the U.S. Army, his personal thoughts on General Stonewall Jackson and what may have happened if Jackson had been at Gettysburg, and his reasons for rejecting high-profile and generous-paying work opportunities after the war in favor of a proposal to become the President of Washington college. Further, the author describes Lee's efforts in healing the war's wounds, and he leaves the reader with a close awareness of Lee's true character and virtues by sharing a few of Lee's personal family letters.

William J. Johnstone's book, Robert E. Lee the Christian,<sup>17</sup> makes no attempt to explain Lee from a biographical point of view, but instead, he concentrates on exposing Lee from a Christian and religious perspective. The author establishes Lee's Christianity, and supports it throughout his book, and frames it as a significant part of Lee's genius and character. Johnstone begins by portraying Lee as a product of generations of Christians. He supports his thesis by establishing and describing Lee's hereditary ties to the Battle of Hastings where an ancestor, Lancelot Lee, accompanied William the Conqueror. Further, he traces and gives many examples of Lee's physical and spiritual development from his childhood to his death. He accomplishes this through selecting letters, orders, dispatches, and writings, and by using the personal knowledge of those who knew Lee to establish and understand the workings of his heart and mind.

In addition to his four-volume biography on General Lee, Douglas Southall Freeman produced a one-volume biography on Lee entitled Lee of Virginia.<sup>18</sup> It covers General Lee's early life through his death

and emphasizes the Lee military genius and character. Although this work was written for the younger generation, or one who does not have the inclination to read his original Lee biography, the work provides enough details of Lee's life to give a good understanding of Lee's greatness and how it was achieved. This book is written without references; Freeman realized that as the Civil War passed in history, future generations would not take the time to read his four volume account of General Lee. So in its place, he published this version with an intent for it to be used as the first publication future younger generations would read before taking on his four-volume account to gain insight into Lee the military leader and Lee the man.

#### Works by Modern Authors

Philip Van Doren Stern's book Robert E. Lee<sup>19</sup> provides a more recent view into Lee's personal life as a man, as the southern general in the Civil War, and as the restorer of relations between the North and the South after the war. This book discusses the legend of Lee and explains his greatness as having resulted more from what Lee did to heal the South's wounds and bring it back into the Union after the war than as its commander in the war. Van Doren Stern leads the reader through Lee's 700 years of ancestry, his childhood, and cadet years at West Point. It touches on Lee as a family man and his role as an loving and warm father of seven children. The author also gives insight into the inner warmth and feelings of Lee as he shows Lee's love for animals and how he treasured heirlooms handed down through the generations of Lees, Carters, and Washingtons. When the Civil War erupted, the author describes Lee's thought process in choosing between serving the Nation

or Virginia, and he describes the ensuing war years as a time when the general gained his glory. Additionally, the author explains those years as only a prelude to Lee's greater accomplishments after the war when he steered away from controversies and devoted himself to healing the wounds of the South and the Nation.

In The Lees of Virginia,<sup>20</sup> Paul C. Nagel presents a non-referenced account of the Lee family from the time Colonel Richard Lee immigrated to Virginia in 1640 through 1870. The author describes the impact of the Lee family on society: their influences through public service, their contributions of their large plantations on the economy, their literary and educational contributions to Virginia and the Union, and their military contributions to Virginia and to America's affairs during the War for Independence and the War of 1812. Moreover, Nagel points out both favorable and unfavorable circumstances about the Lees, while spending little effort in his work on General Lee's war years. Although the author cites no references throughout his book, its real value is found in the last section pertaining to acknowledgments and sources. Finally, the author provides the reader with an excellent background of primary and secondary sources, and the libraries and the repositories where they may be found.

In his book titled The Marble Man,<sup>21</sup> Thomas L. Connolly presents a different view of Robert E. Lee than is written of him from the Civil War to its 1965 Centennial. Connolly contends that the majority of biographies were written by authors who were predisposed to write favorably of Lee because the post-Civil War South needed a hero. The author supports his premise by explaining that the majority of

authors who wrote biographies on Lee were Virginians, and that they provided an abundance of publicity that was designed to create a very favorable impression of Lee. Connelly asserts that these circumstances resulted in what we now know as Lee's national image. In attempting to dispel the Lee myth, the author provides different premises that cut away at the greatness of the Lee family image and the image of General Lee. Although Connelly acknowledges Lee's great mind and character, he is quick to point out that more than these qualities were necessary to capture the mind and hearts of the Nation in the century following the war. The author's book shows a different side of Lee, one which shows character flaws not just in Lee himself, but in the Lee family, beginning with his father.

Clifford Dowdey's work entitled Lee<sup>22</sup> uses several hundred newly discovered documents on Lee that were never used by numerous authors. The writer presents a newer and more meaningful version of Lee's life. The new material expands the knowledge of the role Lee's mother played in influencing the development of his moral and human dimension. It also adds to a newer understanding of his moral character as noticed by his classmates at West Point. Additionally, Dowdey uses Lee's personal letters to relate examples of his virtues and his mistakes. Moreover, the author uses Lee's personal and official correspondence to show Lee's ability to quickly grasp military tactical situations as evidence of his early military genius. Dowdey gives examples of Lee's early genius throughout the book by relating his performance in applying his military skills as a young engineer during

the Mexican war to later events when those same experiences and character qualities were exhibited in his army during the Civil War.

In his biography, Lee of Virginia,<sup>23</sup> William E. Brooks sets out to explain Robert E. Lee as a great American who should be considered a part of America's heritage. The author believes Americans should remember Lee in the same light as Washington and Lincoln. Throughout this work, the author supports this premise by citing the similarities of Lee's genius to those of Washington and Lincoln; and he also analyzes how Lee used his personal character, his influence, and the power of his example to benefit the country. On military leadership and on Lee's genius, the author relates Lee's mistakes and those qualities that he innately possessed which bonded the members of his army to him and to follow him almost blindly. Furthermore, he recounts the development of Lee's personal characteristics by explaining his life in three phases: first, the years that went into preparing him for the Civil War; then, his greatness in conducting the war; and finally, his involvement in rebuilding the South and the Nation.

Walter C. Preston's book, Lee, West Point and Lexington,<sup>24</sup> uses original manuscripts to give an accurate account of three significant periods in General Lee's life related to education and his greatness. He first summarizes Lee's four years of attendance at West Point; then, he relates the two and one-half years he spent there as its superintendent; and finally, he describes the final years of his life that were spent as president of Washington College in Lexington.

In Robert E. Lee, the West Pointer,<sup>25</sup> three authors contribute to show and explain General Lee's life. They present three phases of

his life through the use of pictorial engravings and pictures that illustrate the Lee family at Stratford Hall, his years at West Point as a cadet, and his years as West Point's superintendent. In explaining these three phases of his life, the authors first share the Lee family genealogy from Colonel Thomas Lee through his famous father Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee, and they briefly discuss the life of his mother, Anne Hill Carter Lee. Then, they describe General Lee's years as a West Point cadet and recognize his natural student abilities; they also review the courses he was taught at West Point and share the possible effect of the school's religious influence on him. Finally, the authors provide an understanding of Lee's Academy years as its superintendent, twenty-three years after he left there as a cadet.

In The Story of Robert E. Lee,<sup>26</sup> Ralston B. Lattimore edited letters of General Lee, his family, and of his contemporaries to provide a modern day understanding of Lee's life. The book begins with Lee's life as a young child living at Stratford, Virginia, and ends with his death at Lexington. The author makes no attempt to label his work a Lee biography, but he does show Lee's special character qualities throughout his book. In addition to using Lee's own words, he uses copies of his pen and ink drawings and the writings of those who knew him to present a different view of Lee. The author not only relates Lee's life through his written communications with others, but he also gives a pictorial understanding of the great Lee through Lee's own drawing talent, insight into Lee's sense of humor, and a visual representation of the Lee family.

In her book Robert E. Lee, A Portrait,<sup>27</sup> Margaret Sanborn describes General Lee's life from birth to the period when he decided to fight for the Confederacy. Sanborn departs from the traditional biographer's military view on Lee and writes almost exclusively about Lee the man. Using original source material to reveal Lee's human qualities, she adds a human dimension to the history of Lee. Her work presents Lee's life in a perspective that shows him as a young child who inherited some of his father's faults, a normal fun-loving and athletic teenager, as a loving husband and caring father, as a humanitarian who deeply cared about others, as a West Point educator, and as a philosopher.

In his book Grant and Lee, a Study in Personality and Leadership,<sup>28</sup> J.F.C. Fuller examines the influence of generalship in the Civil War to determine its relevance today. The author's work is not a history of the war, and it does not provide a detailed account of Lee's campaigns. The work's main objective is to examine the influences of Grant and Lee by using events to illustrate their character and personalities. For this study, Fuller's work uncovers those qualities of character and personality that were a large part of Lee the man and of Lee the hero.

### Conclusion

The literature review for this study clearly depicts three kinds of authors and their views on Lee. The generation who wrote about Lee and who were personally close to him show no faults in his family lineage, his character, nor in his leadership during the war. Works published the generation following Lee's death broaden the scope of view

on him. These authors use the works of the original writers on Lee, his personal letters, and war time material to depict faults in the Lee family starting with Lee's father, "Light-Horse Harry" Lee. However, they find no faults with Lee and attest to his greatness and character more so than the earlier authors by explaining what Lee's noble actions accomplished from the war's end to his death. Modern works published approximately 100 years after the war present a very different view of Lee than most previous authors showed. Some authors in this category depict Lee's greatness as being fabricated by favorable authors and historians who were also Virginians. Many show fault with Lee by linking him to failings by members of his close family, most notably his father and older brother who both brought disgrace to the Lee name.

There are ample examples of Lee's early character development either stated or implied throughout the many works reviewed. However, there appears to be no author who formally studied this area of Lee's life. Given the amount of literature on Lee and the many authors and their ideas, this study will allow me to draw original conclusions on this great military leader and add to the historical body of knowledge on Lee and the war.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Fitzhugh Lee, General Lee. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 2.
- <sup>2</sup>William Jones, D.D., Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee Soldier and Man. (New York and Washington: The Neale Publishing Company, 1906), 22-23.
- <sup>3</sup>Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 8.
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CHAPTER 3  
ANALYSIS OF ROBERT E. LEE'S MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

This chapter acknowledges that leadership is an art; therefore, senior Army leaders are not governed by set rules to either exhibit or teach specific leadership virtues to subordinates. However, senior leaders are expected to use personal experiences and ideas, employ Army guidelines and concepts, and use abstractions and generalizations to impart leadership traits to those they lead. This makes leadership virtues a difficult subject to teach and an even harder element to master; it is perhaps why the United States Army chooses to use role models and role modeling as a means to impart leadership values.<sup>1</sup>

In short, we must look to our greatest heroes. In studying Robert E. Lee, we investigate a person who is recognized as a successful military leader and one who demonstrated his abilities with tangible results. It is by examining a leader such as General Lee that we can ever hope to understand the influences in one's life that condition the necessary kind of moral character, then and now, to inspire an Army and move a nation.

In this chapter, I will illustrate that Robert E. Lee's character ethic was the product of family influences in his early, formative years. The study begins with the establishment of Lee's greatness as a military leader by relating what others have said of him

prior to and after the Civil War. Next it reviews and documents instances where Lee either stated, exhibited or demonstrated his moral leadership traits beginning with his years as a student at West Point, and it continues this analysis by working backward through his formative years to his birth. Throughout, this study considers the impact of his family, society, civil schooling, religion, and West Point schooling on his moral growth.

Inasmuch as many who may read this account of Lee may be unfamiliar with his true greatness as a military leader and man, I begin this analysis by citing several examples of what some great leaders of the era said in attesting to the significance of his leadership characteristics. To do this, I will recount what President Abraham Lincoln and General Winfield Scott thought of Lee prior to the Civil War; then I will describe what General Ulyssess S. Grant, the supreme military leader of the victorious northern Army, thought of Lee's capabilities to lead the defeated southern nation and its people back into the Union at the war's end. After establishing General Lee as a leader who demonstrated the kind of character ethic that George Washington deemed was necessary to move soldiers and a nation, I will then demonstrate that Lee had already developed extensive moral habits while at West Point and during his formal schooling years in Alexandria. Finally, I will cite evidence that will show that Robert's moral growth actually began from around the age of two. In doing this, I will explain how his mother was responsible for developing the essential moral traits in Robert's youth that naturally gave rise to his

characteristic self-reliance and the unshakable moral character that, I believe, was the foundation for his future military greatness.

#### Lee's Moral Traits Before And After The Civil War

Shortly before the surrender of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, and the actual declaration of war, General Winfield Scott, the 75-year-old Commander of the United States Army, appointed Lee to Colonel, and on March 28, 1861, President Lincoln signed his commission.<sup>2</sup> Nearly three weeks after becoming a Colonel, two significant events occurred in Lee's life which created an opportunity that most career military officers prepare for over a lifetime. On April 15, President Lincoln expanded the leadership opportunities for the Army's officers by calling for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the southern rebellion, and on April 18, Lee was asked to be the leading field commander of that new Army.<sup>3</sup> Lee was made aware of his government's plans for him by Francis P. Blair, an influential authority in Washington politics. Blair was authorized by President Lincoln to offer Colonel Lee the command of the new 75,000 man Army. These events, in and of themselves, were extraordinary; in such a short period Lee was promoted from Lieutenant Colonel, to Colonel, and then he was asked to accept the highest rank in the Army--Supreme Commander of the Federal Forces in the field. Moreover, with President Lincoln's full knowledge, "General Scott and others of his army friends brought every possible influence to bear upon him [Lee] to induce him to accept the offer."<sup>4</sup> Scott even went so far as to beg Lee "not to throw away the great opportunity of his life."<sup>5</sup>

What was it about Robert E. Lee that convinced President Lincoln to ask this newly promoted Colonel to command the Union Army at

the beginning of the Civil War? Insight into Lee's military genius, as described by General Scott and understood by President Lincoln, gives a perspective as to why Lee was chosen over many others to lead the northern Army.

Lincoln wanted Lee because General Scott suggested, and convinced the President, that Lee was the right man for the job. Prior to, and during, the initial stages of the war, President Lincoln's relationship with Winfield Scott was one of great mutual respect. Lincoln often called on the General at his home or office to seek advice on how to conduct the war.<sup>6</sup> From this, it can be presumed that Lincoln sought, and took, General Scott's advice that Lee should command the Army in the field. Insight into what Lincoln may have actually known about Lee, as apprised by General Scott, is gained from General Lee's Military Secretary, Armistead L. Long. Long chronicled a conversation he had with Mrs. Robert E. Lee relating to this matter shortly after the beginning of the war. He said, "I remember hearing at the time [from Mrs. Lee] that General Scott advised his Government to leave no stone unturned, if possible, to secure him [Lee] to their side, saying at the time that Robert Lee would be worth fifty thousand men to them."<sup>7</sup>

General Scott's high opinion of Lee began as the result of his personal experiences with then Captain Lee in the 1846 war with Mexico; his opinion of him continued to improve long after that war because of future endeavors with Lee. After the Mexican War, the General and Chief stated, on more than one occasion, that his success in Mexico was "largely due to the skill, valor, and undaunted energy of Lee."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Scott was not adverse to making his feelings about Lee's

military exploits publicly known. One such occasion presented itself shortly after General Scott returned from Mexico to his native Virginia to attend a reception held in his honor at the capital in Richmond. It was during this reception that General Scott informed the Richmond Committee they were honoring the wrong man. He felt they should be honoring Captain Robert E. Lee as "the Virginian who deserves the credit of that brilliant campaign."<sup>9</sup>

Equally important documentation of Lee's leadership capability is supplied by William Jones as he relates the following story involving Lee's military capabilities, as once described by General Scott.

The late Gen. William Preston, of Kentucky, said that General Scott told him that he regarded Lee "as the greatest living soldier in America," and that in a conversation not long before the breaking out of the war, General Scott said with emphasis, "I tell you that if I were on my death-bed tomorrow, and the President of the United States should tell me that a great battle was to be fought for the liberty or slavery of the country, and asked my advice as to the ability of a commander, I would say with my dying breath, let it be Robert E. Lee."<sup>10</sup>

Additional evidence of Lee's character is given by Jones when he describes a portion of a speech given by Maryland Senator Reverdy Johnson, shortly after Lee's death. In that speech, Johnson explained that he was with General Scott the day Colonel Lee submitted his resignation to the General. The following portion of that speech depicts Johnson's view on how General Scott perceived Lee's character and how he would conduct the war.

Much as General Scott regretted it, he never failed to say that he was convinced that Lee had taken that step from an imperative sense of duty. General Scott was consoled in a great measure by the reflection that he would have as his opponent a soldier worthy of every man's esteem, and one who would conduct the war upon the strictest rules of civilized warfare. There would be no outrages committed upon private persons or property which he could prevent.<sup>11</sup>

One final anecdote that further lends credence to Scott's high opinion of Lee's leadership capacity prior to the Civil War comes from another personal account related by Jones. This author retells what was told to him by a prominent New York banker who was on personal terms with General Scott. Jones relates that this banker once asked General Scott who was the greatest living soldier. General Scott replied in the following manner.

Col. Robert E. Lee is not only the greatest soldier of America, but the greatest now living in the world. This is my deliberate conviction, from a full knowledge of his extraordinary abilities, and if the occasion ever arises, Lee will win this place in the estimation of the whole world.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, Jones relates that General Scott gave the banker additional commendable perceptions into Lee's military service such as his ability as an engineer, his capacity to plan campaigns, and his skill in commanding large armies in the field. Scott concluded:

I tell you sir [sic], that Robert E. Lee is the greatest soldier now living, and if he ever gets the opportunity, he will prove himself the greatest captain of history.<sup>13</sup>

General Scott's predictions of Lee's capacity to wage war and his actual conduct during the many Civil War campaigns which he personally influenced does indeed establish him, as Scott put it, as "the greatest [military] captain of history." However, the intent of this paper is to prove that a large portion of General Lee's greatness resulted from his "goodness" as a man and leader, character qualities alluded to by Scott before the war and confirmed by General Grant immediately after the war.

This next example of Lee's character is found in a letter written by General Grant; he gives credence to the theory that Lee's character and greatness was built on a strong moral base. In his

letter, I believe Grant consciously attests to Lee's transcendent and imposing capacity to lead, even in defeat, by acknowledging Lee's moral authority at the war's end. Thus, Grant consciously admits that Lee is (as described in General Scott's words before the war) "a soldier worthy of every man's esteem." Here is what General Grant wrote in his May 5, 1865, letter to Major General Henry W. Halleck, the President's Chief of Staff, thereby implying that Halleck should seek counsel with the President to enlist (Lee) into his Army Commander's plan:

Although it would meet with opposition in the North to allow Lee the benefit of amnesty, I think it would have the best possible effect toward restoring good feeling and peace in the South to have him come in [restore Lee's citizenship]. All the people except a few political leaders in the South will accept whatever he does as right, and will be guided to a great extent by his example.<sup>14</sup>

I believe that this letter not only demonstrates that General Grant retained his high esteem for General Lee, but it also shows that Lee still possessed his honorable character ethic, even in defeat. Grant recognized this, and coupled with his desire for the restoration of the Union, he therefore believed Lee was the only man who possessed the kind of moral authority the southern people would follow without hesitation. General Grant's assessment of Lee proved correct. One author noted that what Lee did on the field of battle, in which the odds were hopelessly against his side, made him famous; and what Lee did as a civilian after the war made him great.<sup>15</sup>

General Lee spent his years after the war as the most respected and loved figure in the South. "From all nations, even from the Northern States, came to him marks of admiration and respect."<sup>16</sup> There was an unspoken bond between Lee, his former soldiers, and the southern people.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, he was looked up to by all of his countrymen in the

former Confederacy and by many in the North because of his noble endeavors. Much is learned about Lee's character during this time because he used his power for constructive ends. His unshakable inner security needed none of the tangible support of the old society, and it continued to allow him to lead by example.<sup>18</sup> His character allowed him to hold no bitterness, no grudge, and no rebellious hatred toward his former enemies, and he asked his countrymen to conduct their lives similarly. Throughout the remaining years of his life, Lee used all of his influence to accomplish good, to restore peace and harmony, and to inspire the Southern people to freely accept the government that was established by the outcome of the war.<sup>19</sup> After the war, Lee focused his efforts on rebuilding the South and Virginia, using the war experience and other lessons of the past in making the country stronger, and making all the citizens in it Americans.

As these examples clearly illustrate, Robert E. Lee's character ethic provided him with distinct leadership attributes that contributed to his greatness. However, the next step in determining what influences in his early life helped form his moral character begins with his years as a cadet at West Point.

#### West Point and Lee's Character

The following will show that, at the age of eighteen and prior to the day he set foot on West Point grounds, Robert E. Lee's character traits were already instilled in him. I will first describe his course work and the impact his mentor had on him. Then I will relate his accomplishments and how his character ethic played an important role in them. Next, I will describe what several peers said of him and his

character. Then I will give an example of one way in which his mother influenced his character formation. Finally, I will use a personal letter written by Lee to his son, G. W. Custis Lee, to give further evidence of the kind of character virtues and habits that Lee embraced throughout his life and wanted his son to do likewise.

Robert E. Lee's moral character was forged prior to his entrance to West Point. My research discovered limited evidence of any West Point teachings which indicate he was formally taught integrity, personal responsibility, commitment, and courage. Cadet Lee's 1825-1829 class schedule included the following courses: freshman year--mathematics and French; sophomore year--mathematics, French, and drawing; junior year--natural philosophy (physics in today's terminology), chemistry, and drawing; classes in his senior year were split into two terms. The sum of his senior year classes included: mathematics, French, natural philosophy, drawing, engineering, chemistry, mineralogy, rhetoric and moral philosophy, tactics, and artillery.<sup>20</sup> In addition, although Lee had a mentor whose implied duty was to impart character virtues, my research determined that the primary role of Lee's mentor was to instruct military demeanor and to develop common professional military skills and abilities. Major William J. Worth was Robert's Commandant and mentor for the duration of his cadetship, and it may have been to Major Worth, more than anyone, that Lee owed a great deal for teaching him the military bearing that assisted in distinguishing him throughout his military career. In January 1829 Lee and many of his class members displayed their notable

respect for Major Worth by presenting him with a departing sword showing their appreciation for all that he did on their behalf.<sup>21</sup>

From the very moment that Robert E. Lee arrived at West Point, until the day he graduated, he showed that he was a young man who possessed strong character attributes, such as courage, integrity, commitment, and personal responsibility. Throughout his cadet years, the natural habits that he learned early in life, which included organized routine duties, thoroughly conditioned and led Cadet Lee to do his best in everything he set out to accomplish. Lee attained many honors at school: he was the first cadet at West Point never to receive a demerit, and even more remarkable, he was never reported for an offense.<sup>22</sup> This was a remarkable feat because, at that time, Colonel Sylvanus Thayer, the Superintendent of the Academy, wrote President John Quincy Adams to describe the moral conditions as "not so favorable; that a habit of drinking had become very prevalent. . .that none might testify against another."<sup>23</sup> Records show that Lee was once tempted but declined an invitation to attend a social where "certain wild spirits planned a Christmas eggnog party."<sup>24</sup> Lee's wise judgment and habit to do what was always right again paid off. In this instance, nine cadets were dismissed for violations associated with that party.

In his first year, Robert applied himself academically so that his scholastic achievements placed him on the list of the academy's distinguished cadets.<sup>25</sup> With this performance came the honor of having his name placed on a top five list of distinguished cadets for each class who were then certified to the Secretary of War for inclusion in the Army Register.<sup>26</sup> This was an honor Lee earned each of his four

years; he held high cadet level offices in each of those years; and during his last year, he held the post of honor that all the cadets desired, the Adjutant of the Corps.<sup>27</sup> Robert won this honor not because he graduated number one in his class; he was always near the top in his subjects but never finished first in any; he won this honor because of the general excellence of his overall standing. He excelled in all phases of his academy life from the very beginning because he always conducted his life according to previously ingrained habits. Lee's natural habits gave him an edge and helped position him as a natural leader among his fellow classmates.

Lee's moral habits naturally permitted him to perform requirements outside of the classroom in the same manner in which he studied and prepared for his in class studies. For example, Lee conducted his guard tour duty to the highest of standards, whether the inspecting noncommissioned officer of the guard was observed approaching his post or while away from the area. Unlike many of his peers, Lee "never 'ran the sentinel post,' did not go off limits to the 'Benny Havens' of his day, put 'dummies' in his bed to deceive the officer in charge as he made his inspection after taps, and at the parades stood ready in line."<sup>28</sup> Lee's uniform, his military bearing, and the manner in which he prepared his military equipment caused one author to note: "It was a pleasure for his inspecting officer to look down the barrel of his gun, it was bright and clean, and its stock was rubbed so as to almost resemble polished mahogany."<sup>29</sup>

Of all the character qualities Lee possessed, the one that made him stand above his peers, and still endear himself to them, was the

"natural goodness" that flowed from his capacity to freely give of his time and talents to others. It is my contention that this "natural goodness" came from an earlier formed character ethic that embraced moral virtue and manifested itself in his integrity, his moral courage, his personal responsibility, and in the way he committed himself to a purpose larger than himself. This character ethic is what made him deserving of the honor to represent fellow students as the Corps Adjutant for the class of 1828-1829. Additionally, it was these same character attributes, and the organizational successes that wholly resulted from them, that later led General Winfield Scott to acclaim Lee as possessing the capacity to be the "greatest [military] captain of history."<sup>30</sup>

It is in Cadet Lee's second year where we first see him using his moral habits to benefit others. The natural blend of his integrity, his moral courage, and his personal responsibility are evidenced by his commitment to the larger organization. Rather than being concerned with his own grades and class standing, Lee spent a good deal of his precious "free time" assisting fellow students. From this period, through his senior year, young Robert served his fellow students as a mathematics tutor. This activity brought with it the distinction of being an assistant professor and a remuneration of ten dollars per month. Consequently, because of the significant time involved, it was the one activity that likely prevented Lee from gaining top academic honors in his studies.<sup>31</sup> Yet, it is here that we are able to view how his character traits combined with the first probable circumstance, away from his family home, that likely assisted in making Robert E. Lee both

good and great. For when he made it to the top five of his class (third in his first year, and second the remaining three years), his vision for success permitted him to forgo being a sure bet to be number one at everything. His commitment to a purpose larger than himself permitted him to turn and reach back to assist those class members who fell behind in their academics. Lee tutored and mentored his peers in order to "elevate" them to their better selves. It also allowed Lee to assist others in climbing their ladders to success with patience, trust, and respect. Thus, in doing so, he acted as a bridge that not only allowed him to impart knowledge to others, but his actions also served to empower his fellow cadets and the academy. In doing this, Lee exhibited the character ethic of an interdependent leader, or in modern-day terms, a transformational leader.<sup>32</sup>

I believe this juncture in Lee's life is when he took a quantum leap forward in "natural leadership" growth. His "inner eye" permitted him to comprehend that he would accomplish more in life by assisting others with his talents than if he used them only for self purpose. It is here, too, that he gained important feedback which served to reinforce in him that his decisions and actions were correct; Lee's biggest feedback was the personal satisfaction that he gained from those who required his assistance. He was able to observe their gains and the group's improvement as well. Coupling this with his very strong moral ethic to always do what was right, his proactive and disciplined preparations for the rigorous requirements at the academy, and his genuine concern for others ultimately led individuals, and the group, to realize that whenever Lee was involved with them, they would be winners.

Lee's natural moral habits led to his number two standing upon graduation. More importantly, they represented his character ethic and were, in reality, the very underpinnings of his greatness. Robert's character ethic led to the special love and recognition for him by his fellow students that would last their entire lives, and it led to Lee's greatness, as would later be acclaimed by President Abraham Lincoln, General Winfield Scott, and General Ulysses Grant.

More evidence of Lee's character ethic is gained from two of his many classmates. Dowdey writes the following about the impression Cadet Lee made at West Point, as related by Joe Johnston, a fellow Virginian with whom Lee established a long friendship at the Academy:

We had the same intimate associates, who thought as I did, that no other youth or man so united the qualities that win warm friendship and command high respect. For he was full of sympathy and kindness, genial and fond of gay conversation, even fun, while his correctness of demeanor and attention to all duties, personal and official, and a dignity as much a part of himself as the elegance of his person, gave him a superiority that every one acknowledged in his heart.<sup>33</sup>

While "many mentioned that the naturalness of his superiority placed him beyond the envy of others,"<sup>34</sup> Erasmus D. Keyes, a yearling when Lee was the corps adjutant and later a Federal General who opposed Lee wrote, "I doubt if he ever excited envy in any man."<sup>35</sup> And writing much later with an extended perspective, Keyes comes closest to explaining Lee as a man who possessed a strong character ethic, a transformational leader among his fellows. He wrote, "All his accomplishments and alluring virtues appeared natural to him, and he was free from the anxiety, distrust and awkwardness that attend a sense of inferiority."<sup>36</sup>

Further evidence that supports my premise that Robert E. Lee already possessed a strong character ethic before attending West Point

documents the role Lee's mother played in developing his character virtues. Interestingly enough, this evidence is found in a letter written to Robert's older brother, Smith, at the time Lee finished his sophomore year at the academy.

At the age of 20, in the summer of 1827, and after being away from his mother for two years, Robert gained a leave of absence to spend part of his summer with her. It was during this period that the girls back home took notice of him and that he had matured and become a handsome and well mannered young man. At the academy he was already styled the "marble model."<sup>37</sup> "It was the period of his life when contemporaries began to refer to his 'manly beauty' and superb carriage."<sup>38</sup> It was also the time when his mother recognized that "[Robert] was the realization of all her training and the fulfillment of all her efforts."<sup>39</sup>

It is during this moment of Robert's life that his mother sent a letter to another son, Smith, in which she wrote of virtues and habits. It is here, too, that Ann Carter Lee (Robert's mother) documents her efforts in bringing up all of her children; it is an example of the kind of virtues and habits she taught.

Exclusive of my desire to hear from you, I lament your dislike of writing because it will be such a disadvantage to you through life. A man that cannot write a good letter on business or on the subject of familiar letters will make an awkward figure in every situation and will find himself greatly at a loss on any occasion. Indeed I cannot imagine how he will pass through life with satisfaction and respectability; should you arrive at any eminence in your profession, my dear Smith, it will be essential to your reputation to write a good letter, the knowledge of which cannot be acquired in later life. . . . Oh, that I could impart to you the knowledge gained from the experience of fifty-four years, then would you be convinced of the vanity of every pursuit not under the control of most inflexible virtue. I wish the powers of my mind were equal to the affections of my heart, then could I give you such precepts as would influence your conduct through life, but as the advantage has been denied me I just entreat you, my dear son, to reflect upon your

poor Mother's solicitude for you, let it stimulate you to require the best habits and indulge not one that you could not remember on your deathbed with satisfaction.<sup>40</sup>

Dowdey went on to write that Smith was not guilty of the bad habits or the lack of virtue that Mrs. Lee alluded to in her letter but that he was different from Robert. Since she never had to write to Robert in this manner, "the unworldly mother could not comprehend that in Robert she possessed that rarity of a son who lived completely in his mother's ideal for him."<sup>41</sup> The ideas she had for all her children were fully instilled into Robert; they were no longer her values and habits but his self-image.<sup>42</sup>

Further evidence of the kind of virtues and habits that Lee learned from his mother, and exhibited at West Point and throughout his life, is gained from a letter he wrote to his son. (George Washington Custis Lee entered West Point twenty-one years after his father, and as his father, he became a Cadet Adjutant; he graduated first in his class and was assigned to the Engineer corps.) The following letter by General Lee, written April 5, 1852, gives additional proof of the kind of virtues and habits that were inculcated in Robert by his mother. He, in turn, sought to instill these same qualities in his son. Under nearly the same circumstances as with his mother's letter to Smith, Lee's letter to Custis shows that Lee recognized that his son was also the embodiment of his ideas and efforts. It was Custis in whom Lee's fatherly actions and advice sought to instill the values and habits that were Lee's own self-image through his entire life.

Lee wrote this letter toward the end of Custis' sophomore year at West Point:

I am just in the act of leaving home for New Mexico. My fine old regiment has been ordered to that distant region, and I must hasten to see that they are properly taken care of. I have but little to add in reply to your letters of March 26, 27, and 28. Your letters breathe great pleasure. You must study to be frank with the world; frankness is the child of honesty and courage. Say what you mean to do on every occasion and take it for granted you mean to do right. If a friend asks a favor, you should grant it, if possible; if not, tell him plainly why you cannot. You will wrong him and yourself by equivocation of any kind. Never do a wrong thing to make a friend or keep one; the man who requires you to do so is dearly purchased at a sacrifice. Deal kindly but firmly with all your classmates; you will find it the policy that wears best. Above all, do not appear to others what you are not. If you have any fault to find with anyone, tell him, not others, of what you complain; there is no more dangerous experiment than that of undertaking to be one thing before a man's face and another behind his back. We should live, act and say nothing to the injury of anyone. It is not only the best as a matter of principle, but it is the path to peace and honor.

In regard to duty, let me, in conclusion to this hasty letter, inform you that nearly a hundred years ago there was a day of remarkable gloom and darkness--still known as the dark day - a day when the light of the sun was slowly extinguished, as if by an eclipse. The legislature of Connecticut was in session, and as its members saw the unexpected and unaccountable darkness coming on they shared in the general awe and terror. It was supposed by many that the last day - the day of judgment--had come. Someone in the consternation of the hour moved adjournment. Then there arose an old Puritan legislator, Davenport of Stamford, who said that if the last day had come he desired to be found at his place doing his duty, and, therefore, moved that candles be brought in so that house could proceed with its duty. There was quietness in that man's mind--the quietness of heavenly wisdom--an inflexible willingness to obey present duty. Duty, then, is the sublimest word in our language. Do your duty in all things like the old Puritan. You cannot do more; you should never wish to do less. Never let me and your mother wear one gray hair for any lack of duty on your part.<sup>43</sup>

In summary of this section, I have shown that from the moment Lee first arrived at West Point, through the day he graduated, it was apparent by his conduct and by the respect and admiration of his peers, he was a man whose accomplishments were the result of living his life to the highest standards of integrity, personal responsibility, commitment, and courage. Although West Point played a major role in contributing to Lee's leadership development by allowing him opportunities to practice interdependent leadership principles, my research indicates that Lee's moral character ethic already existed when he arrived at West Point. It

was, again, the product of an earlier period in his life, and it did not develop by chance. Moreover, as evidenced by his mother's letter to an older brother advocating virtue and moral habits, and later when he sent a similar letter to his son Custis, Lee's life seemed to be guided by a moral plan. This virtuous blueprint was seen as a part of Lee's inner nature while at West Point, and it showed in the way it led him to regularly choose the difficult but right paths at the academy when the wrong trails were easier.

The next step in addressing my thesis question is to determine the impact of Lee's formative years on developing his character traits.

#### Formative Years and Character Development

The following will illustrate that Robert E. Lee's character ethic was learned very early in his formative years and that his virtues and moral habits resulted from his mother's early training. I will first cite an incident which occurred shortly before Robert reported to West Point; it gives evidence to an already formed character ethic that shows he was a young "[man] of character activated by principles of honor."<sup>44</sup> Next, I will document what his early teachers mentioned about him to reveal further evidence that he possessed his strong character ethic before attending formal civil schooling. Then, in order to better understand what the influences were in Lee's early life that helped form his moral character, I will explain the following concerning his formative years: First, I will recount what the relationship was between the family, society, religion, and education in the eighteenth century. Next, I will describe how the eighteenth century family educated its children. Finally, I will illustrate the probable

influence of Robert's nineteenth century upbringing as it related to his father and the Lee family image. More importantly, I will document the likely effect of his mother and her Carter family heritage on Robert's character ethic and its growth.

#### Incident Before Reporting To West Point

Jones relates the following account of Robert's character ethic, giving insight into what Lee's West Point classmates would later see and admire in him. At age eighteen, shortly before he departed home to attend West Point his freshman year, young Robert found himself in a circumstance that required him to decide to take action on someone else's wrongful behavior. Based on his principles and honorable habits, young Lee censured an old man of distinction for behavior that was contrary to the acceptable standards of the day.

One of Lee's friends gives a remarkable incident to show the influence which, even at this early day, his simple dignity and high sense of right exercised upon all who came in contact with him, the old as well as the young. Being invited during a vacation to visit a friend of his family who lived in the gay, rollicking style then but too common in old Virginia, he found in his host one of the grand old gentlemen of that day, with every fascination of mind and manner, who, though not of dissipated habits, led a life which the sterner sense of the boy could not approve.

The old man shrunk before the unspoken rebuke of the youthful hero. Coming to his bedside the night before his departure, he lamented the idle and useless life into which he had fallen, excusing himself upon the score of loneliness, and the sorrow which weighted upon him in the loss of those most dear. In the most impressive manner he besought his young guest to be warned by his example; prayed him to cherish the good habits he had already acquired, and promised to listen to his entreaties that he would change his own life, and thereby secure more entirely his respect and affection.<sup>45</sup>

By the norms of his day, this key incident permits one to conclude, beyond a doubt, that Lee's sense of right and simple dignity, exercised on all who came in contact with him, made him a most remarkable and impressive human being in his youth. Too, this incident

confirms that young Robert's consistent moral habits held him to an uncompromising integrity at this early stage of his life. It also indicates that he retained a resolute sense of personal responsibility and commitment to those who attended the gathering with him and to the old gentleman who later promised to mend his moral behavior. Still yet, this circumstance reveals that young Lee possessed the necessary moral and physical courage to actively involve himself in a situation that most would choose to ignore. In reality, and at this early age, Robert was a mentor to all those around him, to the young and old alike. In his youth, Robert E. Lee set standards for all others to follow. His rock-like consistency to continually conduct his life in a worthy manner was not created by nature but by his own making; it was the result of moral habits formed earlier in his life.

#### Character Exhibited During Formal Education

Evidence of "character [as] the essential quality of the man was already discernible in [Robert]"<sup>46</sup> during the formal educational phase of his early life. His academic grounding officially began around the age of seven. Young Robert's first bookish tutoring conceivably was given by his mother, Ann Hill Carter Lee, who up to this time in his life instructed him on everything. It was also during this period that Robert attended one of two Carter family schools where he and his many cousins received a more traditional education. In those days, the Carter family was so large that they maintained two schools for their children, one for girls at the Shirley plantation and one for boys at the Eastern View estate, in Fauquier County, which was also home to Robert's aunt, Elizabeth Carter Randolph.<sup>47</sup> The combination of his home

training and the education at Eastern View prepared Robert well in the subjects of reading, spelling, writing and basic grammar. Support for his early academic achievements would later be confirmed by two of his teachers who subsequently taught him in two separate Alexandria schools.<sup>48</sup>

All of Robert's early childhood education was not primarily concerned with enhancing his intellectual skills; his character traits received a great deal of developmental focus during this period of his life. It was customary in those days for parents to actively transmit moral traits to their children in order to inculcate honorable values in them throughout their lives. Conversely in this matter, Robert was summarily encouraged not to exhibit undesirable character traits. Freeman recounts an incident in which Robert's mother observed a stubborn streak in him after he returned home from his schooling at Eastern View. Ann Carter mentioned this in a letter to her sister, Elizabeth, when she wrote to thank her for her good will toward Robert while he stayed at Eastern View. Elizabeth replied that she always found Robert to be "'a most engaging child,' not difficult to handle, but if he had become so, the only advice she could give was that which she applied with her own boys--to 'whip and pray, and pray and whip.'"<sup>49</sup>

The earliest documented reference to Robert's character ethic is given in a February 9, 1817, letter that was written by his father when Robert was ten years old. More importantly, this letter allows us to learn that his mother is given credit by Mr. Lee for developing Robert's moral virtues. Mr. Lee wrote to Robert's older brother, Charles Carter Lee, and asked, "Robert was always good, and will be

confirmed in his happy turn of mind by his ever watchful and affectionate mother. Does he strengthen his native tendency?"<sup>50</sup>

Robert's character ethic was already discernible when he later attended more formal schooling in Alexandria in 1820, at the age of thirteen. He entered the Alexandria Academy and, for three years, studied the basics of classical education under the instruction of William B. Leary.<sup>51</sup> During this time Mr. Leary became greatly aware of Robert's character traits and lends additional recognition to how these traits impressed Mr. Leary as Robert's teacher.<sup>52</sup> Robert's character ethic affected Mr. Leary in such a way that he would later "always [speak] in the most enthusiastic terms of his studious, well-behaved, gentle, mannerly pupil."<sup>53</sup> Additionally, further evidence of Robert's character traits is documented in a letter which Mr. Leary wrote recommending Robert to West Point:

Robert Lee was formerly a pupil of mine. While under my care I can vouch for his correct and gentlemanly deportment. In the various branches, to which his attention has been applied, I flatter myself that his information will be found adequate to the most sanguine expectations of his friends. . . . He is well versed in arithmetic [sic], Algebra & Euclid. In regard to what he has read with me I am certain that when examined he will neither disappoint me or his friends.<sup>54</sup>

Further evidence of Lee's character traits is given when Robert was eighteen and after he had already received his appointment to West Point but had to wait a year to attend the Academy. Robert had not attended school for a while and decided to use the period of waiting to further prepare himself by attending a private Quaker School headed by Mr. James Hallowell. This teacher reveals the character ethic that Lee exhibited to him:

He was a most exemplary student in every respect. He was never behind-time at his studies; never failed in a single recitation; was

perfectly observant of the rules and regulations of the institution; was gentlemanly, unobtrusive, and respectful in all his deportment to teachers and his fellow-students. His specialty was finishing up. He imparted a finish and a neatness, as he proceeded, to everything he undertook. One of the branches of mathematics he studied was conic sections, in which some of the diagrams are very complicated. He drew the diagrams on a slate; and although he well knew that the one he was drawing would have to be removed to make room for another, he drew each one with as much accuracy and finish, lettering and all, as if it were to be engraved and printed."<sup>55</sup>

As was Mr. Leary, Mr. Hallowell was so affected by Lee's character that he would also relate the following in a letter about his former student: "A feeling of mutual kindness and respect continued between us to the close of [Lee's] life."<sup>56</sup>

It becomes very apparent that both teachers found in Robert a most remarkable young man whose character traits were already formed prior to their affiliations with him. The role of Robert's teachers was to help improve his intellectual capacity, and their efforts would show in Robert's accomplishments at West Point. Remarkably, it is during this phase of his life that Robert E. Lee already exhibited the very gift which Clausewitz termed as "genius."<sup>57</sup> He was sufficiently trained to excel in the intellectual enterprises of life, and his temperament was fully forged. Robert's upbringing permitted his character ethic to thoroughly balance his decisions so that moral bearing ultimately gave him an enormous endowment in self control. This characteristic, along with his mental capacity, would later allow Lee to naturally, and always, choose the moral course of action in his life, even when the most powerful of emotional circumstances would test his will to do otherwise. When Lee departed home for West Point, he required improvements in his intellectual capacity, but no modifications were necessary in his moral ethics. His watchful mother had prepared him

well for his endeavors, and in Dowdey's words it was at this time Robert E. Lee's "mold was cast."<sup>58</sup>

As with every generation since time began, human beings have been influenced by those who preceded them. Time and habit play a significant role in shaping family life and the individuals within that family. Each generation adopts and modifies what was learned from the past and, in turn, passes its customs and traditions on as an inheritance to the next generation.

Many authors have written about Robert E. Lee saying that his "mold was set" before he went off to West Point, as though this was the quality that in some way led to his greatness. My research leads me to conclude that his cast was no different than anyone else's in his time. However, what was unique in Robert's case was what was poured into the mold to form his character ethic. Those ingredients made the child, and later the young student, and still later the military officer who was both "good and great."

My findings lead me to conclude that Robert E. Lee's character ethic evolved directly from deliberate moral efforts by his mother to inculcate "classical Aristotelian" traits into him during his formative years. She instilled in Robert a character ethic that was representative of the greatest colonial leaders in the eighteenth century and before. Robert E. Lee's greatness flowed from a goodness which was imparted to him by his mother in the same manner she inherited it. In short, what went into Robert E. Lee's mold was put there by his mother, Ann Carter Lee, and it represented the best in the heritage of both the Lees and the Carters.

The following section will describe the key influences in Robert E. Lee's early life that helped form his moral character. I will accomplish this in two ways: First, I will relate how his family heritage, parental education and religious upbringing, in conjunction with his living in the Alexandria, Virginia, cultural setting as a young child, all combined, under the tutelage of his mother, to transmit moral character lessons to Robert. Then, I will demonstrate how Robert's parents and, in particular, his mother played a special role in influencing his character habits so that they were in keeping with her eighteenth century upbringing and contrary to certain character traits that were lacking in his father.

Heritage, Parental Education, Religious, and Alexandria, Virginia's  
Cultural Influence on Robert E. Lee

Robert E. Lee was the sum of the culture and traditions inherited from his parents and the society in which he grew. Thus, he was a product of eighteenth century Virginia's "golden age" extended into the first quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Robert's heritage included parents who were born into the Virginia eighteenth century ruling class, and, as with most children at that time, they were raised to excel in Aristotelian virtues that stressed character development so that it "should balance the skills of accomplishment."<sup>60</sup> In this society, the family was held to be the most important social institution, and the attitudes, ideals, customs, and especially the English idea of a patriarchal family and home life were established values whether families lived on plantations, small farms, or out in the frontier.<sup>61</sup> These agrarian age circumstances usually meant that

families lived far apart, and, as a result, they grew to be very independent and reliant on the family for all their support. Children were necessary for family life, and it was under these circumstances that Robert's parents matured, and where, as children, they were trained, at an early age, to the idea that character, family, and home were the highest ideals of life. These principles were a part of the Lee and Carter family heritages; they were the norm in society, and they tended to dominate practically every action in the way families raised their children. Thus, the raising and training of Robert was done in a similar manner. His long-held family traditions and customs would be inculcated in him by the direct influence of his mother and indirectly by his father through his mother.<sup>62</sup>

For reasons that I will explain later, Robert's sense of heritage was almost entirely instilled in him by his mother, Ann Hill Carter Lee, who essentially raised him from the age of two. She was a daughter of one of the noblest families in Virginia and in England. Ann's grandmother was a daughter of Alexander Spotswood, who fought along side Marborough at Blenheim, who became Governor of Virginia in 1770, and whose own ancestry was directly traced to King Robert the Bruce of Scotland.<sup>63</sup> Her father was Charles Carter, and her great grandfather was Robert "King" Carter, whose family lineage produced three signers of the Declaration of Independence, three governors of Virginia, [one Chief Justice of the Supreme Court],<sup>64</sup> and two Presidents of the United States.<sup>65</sup>

It is from this Carter lineage we find the moral values and character ethic that were transferred over four generations to Robert E.

Lee. Robert's great great grandfather, Robert Carter (1663-1732), valued classical education. He learned, early in his life, that his worth as a man would not be measured by worldly riches, but that learning, knowledge, virtue, and wisdom together are what makes a man valuable. Robert Carter learned these lessons when he was a thirteen-year-old orphan with few prospects; he went on to emerge as one of the greatest leaders of his era. Dowdey explains the following about this Carter whose heritage and traditions produced Robert E. Lee:

He personified the germinal era during which the solidification of the ruling class in power brought forth the emergence of the "golden age,--the age which produced the generation of the founders of the Republic--and as a personification he was of course reflected in the era."<sup>66</sup>

As an orphan, and while residing with an uncle in England, Robert Carter learned to value classical education, and he would apply its lessons to his future. His life in Virginia would accurately reflect his belief that knowledge, virtue, and wisdom together make a man valuable. His life would also support his boyhood estimation, while studying in England, of the lasting value of classical education as explained by Dowdey:

"On the wisdom of the ancients was to be found a way of life suitable for young Virginians to imitate." The goals and youthful values that had fulfilled him were constantly revealed in . . . letters [he would later write] to and about his sons and his grandsons. To his grandson, he summarized his credo: "You are now growing toward manhood. It is not fine clothes nor gay outsight, but learning and knowledge and virtue and wisdom that makes a man valuable."<sup>67</sup>

In addition to his early grounding in classical studies, Robert Carter put equal importance on the training of conduct and the development of character so that it would fit one to assume future responsibility. Education in his day stressed development of the whole

man, "capable of assuming obligations for himself and his society-- inherent in the status of "Christian gentleman."<sup>68</sup> The "good as well as the great" was an expression of the ideal which was inherited from Robert Carter and had been embodied in his son, Charles Carter, Robert E. Lee's grandfather, and which Robert's mother would consistently hold before him.<sup>69</sup>

From Robert's great great grandfather, Robert Carter, and onward, the Carters had been characterized by community responsibility and deep religious devotion.<sup>70</sup> In those same Carters at Shirley Plantation, and in his mother in his own home, Robert saw exemplified a very simple, straightforward loyalty to family, to church, and to God. This was tradition with the Carters and with young Robert E. Lee.<sup>71</sup>

Although only four years old when he moved to Alexandria from his father's Stratford Plantation, Robert's sense of the Lee heritage would grow from the special meaning his father's Stratford estate represented. It is in this home that Robert identified with the many traditions associated with the Lee family lineage. As he grew, its special meaning to him was enhanced through visits with his half-brother, Henry, and his sister-in-law who lived there. In all probability, when they would extend their hospitality to Robert, their reminiscing about Stratford and their common heritage would likely impress and reinforce Robert's early memories of his father's great estate. At this time, its traditions and his heritage were likely to be deeply imbedded in his consciousness.<sup>72</sup> Those traditions were in all probability his imagination of Stratford's heroic history. That history included the days when his father led forces against the British during

the Revolutionary War, and when, under General Washington's command, he gained the reputation as the great "Light-Horse Harry" Lee. The portraits in his family home would also represent to him a sense of "partly mythical tales, though there was nothing mythical about the Lee signers of the Declaration of Independence having been born in the same room in which Robert was born."<sup>73</sup> Robert would later acknowledge his bond with Stratford Hall when, instead of providing Alexandria, Virginia, as his residence address on his application to West Point, he listed Westmoreland County, the site of Stratford Hall. Although he lived in Alexandria for fourteen years, this clearly "indicates his identification with his birthplace and showing that the family regarded town as only an interlude."<sup>74</sup>

The education of children in Robert's time was transferred from one generation to the next, in accordance with the educational traditions of the previous generation. In the era in which Robert's parents were educated, individualism was a trait that tended to dominate the actions of Virginians. This was a time when the state was still excluded from taking over the long accepted family responsibility in educating its children. For his parents and others of their generation, education exemplified strict discipline and a moral Christian upbringing--education that was not only expected but maintained in the family setting and had no business in schools sponsored by the state.<sup>75</sup>

We are able to gain a more thorough understanding of the manner in which Robert was educated early in his formative years through the writings of a tutor at the Carter Nomini Hall school in the 1800s. My research shows that Robert was educated under nearly the same

circumstances as his parents until he attended schools in Alexandria at the age of thirteen. He was educated either at home, directly by his mother, or at the Carter kinsman Eastern View plantation school for boys, under the eye of his aunt, Elizabeth Carter Randolph.<sup>76</sup> Since Ann was solely responsible for Robert's education, insight as to how she would later educate and raise him is gained from the educational traditions that she received in her formative years.

In the eighteenth century culture, a daughter was taught that her chief function as a wife was to assist her husband in establishing a family, and to bear and rear children with strong moral ethics.<sup>77</sup> An underlying rule of the time was that parents were willingly and personally responsible for the proper education and moral growth of their children. Thus, since mothers were solely responsible for everything that went on within the home, including the raising of their children, character development was primarily the responsibility of the mother. She accomplished this by imparting her long-held family values and traditions, with the learned input from her husband, to her children from the age of two to about the age of seven. One author noted that mothers then would principally teach "in turn the hornbook, and the primer . . . [and] private tutors took over the torch when the 'Mother Goose' days were over."<sup>78</sup> The children of the leading families were taught by tutors in their own homes or in another conveniently located home.<sup>79</sup> In the case of Robert's mother, she attended school at the Shirley Plantation school for girls which was her actual home.<sup>80</sup> As already noted, every facet of training, including the disciplining of children, at that time was the mother's responsibility, and it was

usually accomplished through counseling her offspring and restraining their play when things got out of hand. Finally, it was also the mother who insisted upon good manners and urged her children to be "calm and obliging to all the servants, and when you speak do it mildly, even to the poorest slave."<sup>81</sup>

There are no formal writings which would indicate Robert received religious training anywhere other than from his mother. Of particular interest, Robert was born near "Pope's Creek Church where George Washington's family, the Lees, Paynes,"<sup>82</sup> and other great colonial families worshipped. Moreover, Robert also attended the Alexandria Christ's Church as a young boy, the very same church Washington worshipped in while he lived in Alexandria. Although Robert was naturally religious, he "never presented himself for confirmation and probably never gave a thought to the ministry."<sup>83</sup> As a cadet, there is no mention of any significant events that would indicate formal religious education, although it was mandatory for cadets to attend weekly religious services.<sup>84</sup>

Just as the transfer of Robert's heritage and education were, in a very large way, the undertaking of his mother, so, too, was her religious influence on him. Insight into the manner in which she achieved this special kind of education is associated with her father and how he influenced her. The Shirley Plantation was the home of Ann's father, Charles Carter, and it was here where Robert's mother was raised and educated in the traditions of the Carters. "Robert's grandfather, Charles Carter, revealed religion and noblesse oblige and blended these virtues without any thought of creed or system."<sup>85</sup> "By the Carters at

Shirley, as with his mother in his own home, Robert saw exemplified a very simple and straight forward loyalty to family, to church, and to God."<sup>86</sup> It stands to reason that the religious devotion that would later characterize Robert was a direct result of what he learned from his mother. Ann's "precepts were those her family had prospered by for generations, and the Carter convictions were to her as life itself."<sup>87</sup> In inculcating these principles in Robert, she showed him "the untouchable sweetness of her nature and the unlost innocence of pleasure in simple things."<sup>88</sup> It was also her unquestioning faith in God that she implanted in Robert. Robert would exhibit these spiritual qualities through his total acceptance of circumstances within and beyond his control. This acceptance was, inwardly and outwardly, because of his inherent inner security that was attained by doing the best he could within the design of God. Whatever action duty assigned him, implicit in that duty was the need for him to do it to the best of his abilities.<sup>89</sup>

Nothing he wrote or any recorded word indicated he ever presumed on any other course of action, large or small, which he did not assume its accordance with God's will. If his aim fell outside the defined design, then "God's will be done." Without articulating this attitude, it was as unreflectively assured as breathing <sup>90</sup>

The influence of society on Robert, from the age of four through his eighteenth year, principally came from the citizens, the traditions, and the heritage of Alexandria, Virginia. During this time, Alexandria was a place of some distinction. Up the river was a newly built mansion, called Arlington Hall, in which Robert would later marry Mary Randolph Custis, great granddaughter of Martha Custis Washington, the wife of George Washington.<sup>91</sup> Down the river was George Washington's

home, Mount Vernon, and almost four miles beyond was Gunston hall, the home of George Mason, "the Plato of the Revolution."<sup>92</sup> Although George Washington was already dead ten years when the Lees moved to Alexandria, it maintained a strong association with George Washington as Robert grew and became old enough to understand something of the spirit of the Father of his country. Alexandria maintained a strong association with George Washington; he was alive in the hearts of Alexandrians, and reminders of him were everywhere. The market place was where he drilled his Virginia Rangers before he had set out for Braddock; it was in the city tavern, hardby, where Washington kept his headquarters and had written out his reports, and it was to the Alexandria post office where he often traveled in person. While Robert was growing up in Alexandria, many citizens still lived to tell "how magnetically the General had ridden by and, with almost gracious dignity, [how] he had acknowledged their salutes."<sup>93</sup> Moreover, Alexandria was a place full of the spirits of men such as James Monroe, James Madison, Washington, and other statesman, soldiers, and patriots whose lives filled the pages of American history.<sup>94</sup>

Closer to home, and of more meaning to Robert, Alexandria was the place where twenty Lees had enlisted to fight the British. When Robert played or when he traveled on errands to the market, he would likely have often heard military titles being spoken on the Alexandria streets. It would not be uncommon for Robert to see "Colonel Charles Simms, the mayor; General Daniel Roberdeau, who always wore tight leather breaches; Colonel George Gilpin, the postmaster; Colonel Philip

Marsteller, and Colonel Charles Little, who rode in from Denbigh in Fairfax county."<sup>95</sup>

It is in this small town where Robert came into daily contact with these courageous men that his early moral development would be enhanced by the Alexandria society. It is here that he would likely learn the moral reasoning for the Revolutionary War from those who participated in forming the new republic while he grew. They, too, in some small way, may have inspired him to choose their moral road to war when it came time to decide between fighting for the North or the South in the Civil War.

In Robert's home, and because of his father's close association with General Washington during and after the war, stories about Washington were surely shared among family members and were part of Robert's life from his earliest childhood. Doubtless some of those tales included what General Washington once wrote in a letter regarding the Lee family and their involvement with the Declaration of Independence: "I know of no country that can produce a family all distinguished as clever men, as our Lees."<sup>96</sup> Two of Robert's uncles, Richard Henry Lee who declared on June 10, 1776, that "'these colonies are and of the right ought to be, free and independent States'" and his brother Francis Lightfoot both signed the Declaration of Independence.<sup>97</sup>

It was likely that Robert's mother remembered, and conceivably preserved and shared, her memories of the letter which Washington had written to Robert's father in congratulating him on his marriage. Washington wrote: "As we are told that you have exchanged the rugged and dangerous field of Mars for the soft and pleasurable bed of Venus,"

and he went on to say, "I do in this as I shall in everything you may pursue like unto it, good and laudable, wish you all imaginable success and happiness."<sup>98</sup> Because of Washington's close association with Robert's father, it is conceivable that his family held the same kind of reverence for George Washington as his father retained for him. It was my sense throughout my readings that George Washington was Henry Lee's hero, and in all likelihood since Washington was his father's hero, Washington would be Robert's hero, as well. Robert's allure with the family who founded American liberty likely played a consequential role in why he chose to marry Mary Randolph Custis, the great granddaughter of George Washington. Thus, in the family where Robert was raised, God came first and then came Washington.<sup>99</sup>

So, in concluding this section, we can see that Robert E. Lee's heritage, parental education, religious upbringing, and the cultural influence of living in Alexandria, in large measure, were the ingredients that went into Robert's mold. What was put into that cast was, in no small way, influenced by his mother.

#### Influence of Robert E. Lee's Parents On His Character Ethic

Robert E. Lee was born to parents whose family lineages were equally illustrious in England as well as in Colonial America. He was born on January 19, 1807,<sup>100</sup> his father was Henry Lee, whose ancestry is clearly traceable to the Norman Conquest and the Battle of Hastings in 1066,<sup>101</sup> and who at the age of 25, "was already one of the most renowned American soldiers."<sup>102</sup> He gained the name "Light-Horse" Harry Lee because he was a Revolutionary War hero whose exploits in the war

between Great Britain and the colonies were "frequently commended by [General George] Washington and [because he] came out of the war with a brilliant reputation"<sup>103</sup> as a soldier and future statesman. Henry Lee's military service under General Washington during the war not only endeared him to his great general but earned him a newly minted Congressional gold medal that expressed the gratitude of that legislature and the new nation it represented.<sup>104</sup>

After the war, Henry Lee ran for and was elected to a Virginia seat in Congress in 1786. In 1787, he stood in the Virginia convention next to James Madison, John Marshall, Edmund Randolph, and others who favored the ratification of the Constitution of the United States. In 1791, Light-Horse Harry was chosen governor of Virginia for the first of three consecutive one-year terms. In 1794, President Washington, "his warm friend and admirer,"<sup>105</sup> appointed Henry Lee a Major General to command troops sent to quell the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania. Again, in 1799, he ran for, and was elected to, Congress, and upon George Washington's death, Congress chose Robert E. Lee's father to compose and deliver a funeral oration for America's greatest hero. It is Henry Lee's speech which was given during Washington's eulogy that remains famous and is often quoted by every school child since--"'First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his fellow citizens.'"<sup>106</sup>

As was customary at the time, Henry Lee retired after his third term as Governor of Virginia. He was a Revolutionary War hero, a gentleman of impeccable manners and flashing conversation, and his reputation as the Governor of the most powerful State in the republic

made him popular and in the public eye enough to be mentioned as a possible successor to Washington as President.<sup>107</sup>

Robert's father was married twice. He was first married to Matilda, the daughter of Philip Ludwell Lee, of Stratford, with whom he had four children. Then after Matilda's death, while governor of Virginia, Henry married Ann Carter. She was the daughter of the richest planter in the colony, and with her he had six children, one of whom was Robert E. Lee.<sup>108</sup> The Carters and the Lees had been dominant in the Virginia ruling class since the 1640's, and their June 1793 wedding was the first time the two great families were joined in marriage.<sup>109</sup>

Ann Hill Carter Lee, mother of Robert E. Lee, was of equally illustrious ancestry as her husband. However, unlike her famous husband, Ann's greatness evolved from her inherited ancestral character ethic. It was Ann's inner strength and goodness of character that allowed her to endure the embarrassment and pain that Henry brought upon their marriage. Doubtless, under the pressures put on her by her husband, her inner strength and her character traits were used as a filter and conduit to place in all of her children, and particularly in Robert, the "soil of truth, morality, and religion so that his boyhood was marked by everything that produced nobility of character in manhood."<sup>110</sup>

Robert's father was "self-indulgent [and] spoiled by too many gifts. Having won early, with little effort, everything his world had to offer, he could not become a man of application."<sup>111</sup> His chief character weakness resulted from habits and a lack of discipline to control himself from a wild mania for land speculation. Although Henry

Lee was never malicious in character or dishonest in purpose, his land schemes were grandiose, and the profits in his mind ran into the millions.<sup>112</sup> Unfortunately, his lack of talent for finance and his incompetence in handling money<sup>113</sup> impaired his famous reputation and created great strains on the confidence with those who invested in his schemes. (His speculations even involved George Washington and once caused Washington to declare that Henry Lee had not repaid him what was owed him.)<sup>114</sup>

Robert was two years old on April 11, 1809, when his father was arrested for his large debts and was confined to jail at the county seat of Westmoreland. Later in the same year, he was imprisoned again for the identical reason in Spotsylvania, Virginia. It was not until the spring of 1810 that he gained his freedom, and upon arriving at home, he realized he had nothing left except some lands he could not market.<sup>115</sup> Creditors had taken all of his belongings except Stratford Hall because Maltilda Lee had willed it to their eldest son, Henry, before she died.<sup>116</sup> Not long after his return to Stratford in the spring of 1810, son Henry, who was 23 and had just finished college, was waiting for his father's return so that he could move Ann and her children out of Stratford in order that he could claim his inheritance.<sup>117</sup>

Robert was four years old when his father moved the family to a modest residence on Cameron Street in Alexandria; he was six when his father left his family to visit the West Indies for his health. He was never seen again by any member of the Lee family. This time, Henry departed because he had gotten himself into serious misfortune defending a friend in Baltimore. Robert's father was seriously injured and nearly

killed in an attack by an angry mob. His injuries left him permanently crippled and totally dependent on Mrs. Lee for support, and his wounds ultimately led to his death.<sup>118</sup> "Hope was dead now in the heart of Henry Lee for the fortune that was to be made in his next venture. . . . His one ambition was to leave the country, both for his health and for his peace of mind."<sup>119</sup> Henry Lee died at Dungeness, Cumberland Island, Georgia, March 25, 1818. The details of his passing were not known to his family until the next autumn.<sup>120</sup>

We may gather from these events that Robert had no direct influence from his father at home, as man of the house, from the age of two to three years. Moreover, his father was never head of the Lee household after his family departed Stratford. Since Robert was six when he last saw his father, and since Henry was more a visitor in Ann's Alexandria home than the head of the house, it is doubtless that Robert could ever remember anything of him that was not told to him by his mother and his closest family members.<sup>121</sup> It becomes very apparent that from Robert's second year, it was his mother who held the family together and became the dominant figure in his world. Having grown up herself in a happy childhood with affectionate respect for her father, she used her days to train her children in the values by which she had been raised; she was most successful in imparting this training to Robert who came immediately and intimately under her loving care.<sup>122</sup> "If he was early trained in the way he should go, his mother trained him. If [Robert] was 'always good,' as his father wrote [when Robert was 10], she labored to keep him so. If his principles were sound, and life a success, to her, the praise given."<sup>123</sup>

The Lee family's new life in Alexandria was supported by income from a trust left by Ann's father and a smaller trust left by her sister Mildred, who had died three months after Robert was born.<sup>124</sup> Ann was known for the selfless care she devoted to her children.<sup>125</sup> All her life, her children and others were drawn to her by her happy heart and a sweetness of nature which suggests she possessed the quiet inner strength that one exhibits as a result of a well-developed character ethic.<sup>126</sup> She inherited these virtues from her father, and like her father, she inculcated them into her offspring. In her husband, Ann would recognize an unbalanced character ethic that took him to greatness and also brought him to his knees. Mrs. Lee would use Light-Horse Harry's cast to serve her to reinforce strong moral character traits in her children. It would remind her that her daily duty in life was to inculcate in Robert and all of her children, from infancy and onward, the same moral traits that she learned as habits from her earliest days and which became as natural as breathing to her.

Mrs. Lee took Henry's tragedy to heart, and the reasons for his fall, and she was determined that his grim cycle of promise, over confidence, recklessness, disaster, and ruin should not be rounded in the lives of her children. Self-denial, self-control, and the strictest economy in all financial matters were part of the code of honor she taught them from infancy.<sup>127</sup>

These qualities, which were the precise reverse of those his brilliant father had displayed, were instilled in Robert so early and so deeply by his mother that they became fundamental pillars of his character. "[Robert] probably never knew a time when they were not held up before him as great axioms of conduct. [It is] no wonder he was accustomed to say[ing] in later life that he owed everything to his mother."<sup>128</sup> Ann went through great measures to protect all of her

children from the cares that burdened her and Henry. As a result, her children grew up with a sense of completeness and fulfillment that plantation life could yield to hearts that were filled with joy and happiness. All their lives, Robert and his sisters and brothers showed the effects of a happy childhood.<sup>129</sup> "Robert was his mother's child. His mental cast was formed totally by her. Henry's contribution were a strong and well proportioned body and physical courage."<sup>130</sup>

However, even in Light-Horse Harry's darkest times, he took pleasure in his children and communicated to them a sense of his warmth and color.<sup>131</sup> Despite his failures, Mrs. Lee never lost her love for him, and she did everything within her power to ensure that his children honored their father's memory and cherished his sayings.<sup>132</sup>

A meaningful understanding of the Henry Lee whom Mrs. Lee would forever love is obtained through his sayings, and a more indepth view of his indirect affect on Robert's moral character is gained from declarations in letters he would write shortly before he died. These letters show Henry Lee's better nature, the tenets in which he fervently believed, but could not always follow. It is also important to note that Robert would later acknowledge these letters as "these letters of love and wisdom," in his version of his father's memoirs, written prior to his own death in 1870.<sup>133</sup> Of additional importance, Henry Lee's letters not only give us a deeper understanding of the kind of love he had for his children, but they also show us that he believed it was his heartfelt duty to inculcate character ethics in his children. Though Henry Lee would never lay eyes upon his children again, he made great

efforts to fulfill this duty to his children by faithfully writing to them.

Doubtless Mrs. Lee would share the meanings, teach the principles, and answer any and all questions that Robert would ask concerning these letters until he was old enough to read and understand them on his own. In a letter dated June 26, 1816, Henry wrote Carter:

You will [at Cambridge] have not only excellent examples to encourage your love and practice of virtue, the only real good in life . . . your kind, amiable disposition will never cease enjoying and amplifying your father's happiness to the best of your ability. You will do this by preferring the practice of virtue to all other things; you know my abhorrence of lying, and you have been often told by me that it led to every vice and cancelled every tendency to virtue. Never forget this truth, and disdain this mean and infamous practice.<sup>134</sup>

In a similar letter written August 8, 1816, he wrote the following to Carter, again extoling values for living one's life in a moral manner:

I entreat you to cherish truth and abhor deception. . . . Dwell on the virtues, and imitate, as far as lies in your power, the great and good men whom history presents to our view. . . . You have my favorite precept [poem on Minerva], instilled from your infancy by my lips, morning, noon, and night, in my familiar talks with you, here presented to your mind in the purity and elegance of the Grecian tragedian [Sophocles]. You never, I trust, will forget to make it the cardinal rule of your life.<sup>135</sup>

In a September 30, 1816, letter to Carter, Henry once more conveys his convictions on religious and moral virtues, and he gives advice as to which great authors his son should read in order to enhance his moral character traits. Moreover, in this letter, Henry describes George Washington as being the model he felt most represented moral character traits for his children to emulate. Finally, this letter shows us Henry's concern for his sons, Smith and Robert, particularly as they were to be living their lives in accordance with their father's definition of duty.

Important as it is to understand nature in its range and bearing, it is more so to be prepared for usefulness, and to render ourselves pleasing by understanding well the religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong . . . Read therefore the best poets, the best orators, and the best historians; as from them you draw principles of moral truth, axioms of prudence and material for conversation. This was the opinion of the great Socrates. . . . Be a steady, ardent disciple of Socrates; and regard virtue, whose temple is built upon truth, as the chief good. I would rather see you unlearned and unnoticed, if virtuous in practice as well as theory, than to see you the equal in glory to the great Washington; but virtue and wisdom are not opponents; they are friends and coalesce in a few characters such as in [Washington]. . . . Tell me about my dear Smith and Robert: their genius, temper, their disposition to learn, their diligence, and perseverance in doing what is assigned to them. Tell me the whole truth; and be virtuous, which will render you happy.<sup>136</sup>

In his letter written December 1, 1816, Henry wrote the following which not only shows his high regard for the studies of John Locke, but it also reveals that he urged his children to study and keep Locke's writings close for reflection throughout life.

I must urge you . . . to avoid all frivolous authors; such as novel writers, and all skeptical authors, whether religious, philosophic, or moral. Adhere to history and ethical authors of unrivalled character; first of the latter description is John Locke; do not only read him, but study him; do not only study, but consult him as the Grecians did the Delphic oracle.<sup>137</sup>

In this same letter, Henry Lee went on to quote the first of John Locke's "meditations." When Henry finished it in its entirety, he mentioned the following as it related to Locke's passage:

You will agree that a boy thus reared must turn out good and great when a man; and you will, I hope, hold before your eyes as a model, Marcus Aurelius. It is a small book, and its precepts should be engraven upon your mind and habituated in your conduct.<sup>138</sup>

Although these notes are a small sample of Henry Lee's writings to his family, it may be understood that these chronicles provide a testimony of his love for his children. Along with the many letters he would write to his children, and in conjunction with Ann's personal knowledge and love for him, it is my sense that Ann made Robert aware very early in his life that his father was a man of prominence. I

believe she instilled in Robert that his father's career was marked with both brilliance and shame. Moreover, Robert would also learn that his father was almost a great man and surely a great soldier.

Knowing this, Robert would develop strongly implanted and affectionate feelings for his father, and his own actions would later reveal that he regarded him with a sense of defensive pride over how he may have thought history would portray him.<sup>139</sup> Perhaps this feeling for his father resulted from Robert's learned classical view of life where man's true greatness flowed from a well-developed character ethic. As he grew, he became more aware of the effects of an unbalanced character ethic as it relates to one's happiness and resultant successes in life. It is logical to deduce that Ann served as a conduit for what was poured into his mold and would bear down harder on Robert in his early years to stress those traits that were opposite to his father's squandered gifts, opposite to the irresponsibilities that overtook him<sup>140</sup> and more in line with classic Aristotelian teachings.

Thus far, I have established who was responsible for Lee's early character development and what went into his mold. What I have not talked about, to a great extent, is how all those ingredients were combined into Robert's lasting sense of self, and his sense of oneness within his environment that, for the rest of his life, would naturally lead him to greatness. That circumstance in his life was a seven-year period which would consolidate and condition everything that was poured into his mold and serve to support Aristotle's ethos premise. From the age of around eleven, when his father died, and until Robert was eighteen, when he departed for West Point, the responsibility of caring

for his mother and his two sisters fell on his shoulders. Robert's "Sister Ann, to whom he showed special devotion, continued to be sickly, and she sometimes required medical attention in Philadelphia."<sup>141</sup> During this same period, his mother was sickly and was irreversibly slipping into chronic invalidism. He would also care for his baby sister, nine-year-old Mildred. He would accomplish his new duties without the assistance of his two oldest brothers who were grown and had moved away--Carter practiced law in Washington, and Smith began a career in the Navy.<sup>142</sup>

Under these circumstances "Robert [naturally] became the house keeper, carried the keys, did the marketing, managed all the outdoor business, and took care of his mother's horses."<sup>143</sup> Moreover, Robert would take her for drives in the carriage when he came home from school, and before and during those drives, he would carry her in his arms and arrange her cushions when she was uncomfortable. Many duties were taken on by young Robert that were additional to his daily school requirements, and unlike that of many of his friends. His many duties required ritualistic and disciplined habits. He developed personal responsibility to accomplish all that was required of him during these years. He had instilled in him, by his mother and sisters, a sense of higher commitment which prevailed and went beyond himself to his family. He would continually practice moral courage, always choosing what was right for the women under his care, rather than to allow any of his personal desires and natural needs to interfere with what was right for his family. Throughout this period of Robert's life, many of the events also permitted him to mature in his integrity; doubtless, he and his

family would discuss the truths expressed in his father's letters to Carter. These character traits were not unlike those he would naturally exhibit to his teachers while attending school in Alexandria and to his classmates while at West Point. It is under these circumstances, during this phase of Robert's youth, that his neighbors would notice that the young boy would exhibit a character ethic which indicated he became "the man of the family."<sup>144</sup>

Moreover, it is here, too, that Robert would hone the discipline for self-command that his mother had inculcated in him from his babyhood.<sup>145</sup> Of all her children, Ann's nurturing relationship in combination with her happy heart further instilled in Robert an instinctive sense of discipline and responsibility.<sup>146</sup> As the center of Ann's life, it is in this period of Robert's life where we may assume that he took on his duties gradually and naturally. The new duties in his life became natural and ritualistic habits that would later characterize Robert at West Point and throughout his life as an interdependent leader. Therefore, at this stage of Robert's life, he matured early and deliberately, and his sense of responsibility and sound moral habits were strengthened substantially.<sup>147</sup> His duties and loving care for his mother and sisters continued until Robert left Alexandria for West Point. Perhaps more than anything else, Robert's attention to his mother, where his duty included both those of a son and daughter, was the prime obligation of his adolescence. Therefore it came as no surprise to those who knew Mrs. Lee that when he departed her to attend West Point, she was heard to say, "How can I live without Robert? He is both son and daughter to me."<sup>148</sup>

In absorbing his mother's precepts on self-discipline and purposefulness, by following his practices, Robert formed a ritualistic sense of order in which everything that should be accomplished was naturally completed without waste of motion or time lost in deciding what to do. In successfully serving as his family's support in adolescence, I believe Robert developed an inner security that permitted his character traits to express completeness within himself and within his environment, and which he never later relinquished. With this indivisible oneness so early instilled into his spiritual being, Robert's behavior from his earliest days would naturally nourish his character growth when he was away from the direct influence of his mother. Therefore, he never wasted time experimenting with his life because of an identity crisis; nor did he waste time mimicking and seeking out others who might act as a role model for an underdeveloped character ethic--his cast was already set. It is at this point in Robert's life where he shows us that the seven years of serving his family was a period in which his practices became natural habits. These habits unconsciously taught him that the only true influence he could have on anyone else is by how he lived his own life, how he acted, and what he stood for.

Lee's cast was indeed set--his character ethic allowed him to unconsciously spend his young adult years in Alexandria and at West Point influencing others. Thus it was Robert E. Lee's balanced character ethic that brought him his inner happiness and permitted him to focus all his efforts on becoming a being whose spirit acted to inspire others to great accomplishments. General Lee's moral character

and subsequent inspirational leadership was a product of what was poured into his character mold very early in his formative years. It was to a large extent also the result of habits formed in him from the age of eleven through eighteen. Peers, teachers, subordinates, and superiors would all notice Lee's moral character traits, and it was unlikely that they knew why, but it was the origin of their affinity toward him; it was the very foundation of his greatness.

At this point, I feel it is important to mention that I also took into consideration authors who were not in agreement with most of the researchers who wrote on Lee and presented him in a positive light. In order to give an objective review, I uncovered authors such as Thomas L. Connelly who wrote The Marble Man and J.F.C. Fuller who wrote Grant and Lee; both writers presented contrary views on Lee. In cases such as these, contrary views either quickly glossed over Lee's formative years, or the writings mainly dealt with military exploits or events that occurred much later than the period on which this study focuses. For these reasons, I was unable to use the information presented by these authors.

### Conclusion

I have illustrated with a great deal of certainty throughout this chapter that General Robert E. Lee's moral character was influenced by his mother very early in his formative years. In studying and analyzing the moral character of Lee in his early life, it became very evident to me that his character ethic is what gave him the capability to inspire his Army and move the southern nation. Evidence of this leadership trait is gleaned through what others said about him from the

age of ten years and onward. Lee's moral character became an extension of his own sense of self-worth early in his life--to him, it was as natural as breathing.

In studying Lee, I am convinced that Aristotle and Clausewitz were correct in saying that genius is composed of intellect and character. Just as important, Washington was also correct in exclaiming that leaders are activated by character and moved by honorable beliefs. Lee embodied these principles early in his life. He was born with a natural genetic propensity for intellectual endeavors; however, it was very apparent to me that his moral character was formed through habits. His mother not only read to, talked to, or mentored him by allowing him to "catch" her moral traits; she also lived by a moral plan, and she expected and reinforced Robert to do so, also.

Finally, I also realize that the key to Lee's success was not that he came from great ancestry; he actually came from a broken home and a dishonored family name. What counted most was what was poured into his character "mold." His mother instilled in his "cast" time-honored Aristotelian principles. Just as we "play as we practice" for success on any sports or battlefield today, Mrs. Lee ensured that Robert practiced his moral traits so that when difficult events came later in his life, his naturally ingrained habits would lead him to always act on his principles of honor.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>US Army, FM 22-103, Leadership and Command at Senior Levels. (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1987), 18-25.
- <sup>2</sup>Clifford Dowdey, Lee. (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 129.
- <sup>3</sup>Douglas Southhall Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography. 4 Vols., (New York: Schribner's Sons, 1934), 436-437.
- <sup>4</sup>John Willaim Jones, Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man. (New York: Washington, Neale, and Co., 1906), 126.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup>Donald T. Phillips, Lincoln on Leadership. (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1992), 114.
- <sup>7</sup>Armistead Linsay Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee. (New York, Philadelphia: Jim Stoddart, 1886), 92.
- <sup>8</sup>Jones, Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man, 130.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., 127.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup>Jones, Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man, 129.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 641.
- <sup>15</sup>Philip VanDoren Stern, Robert E. Lee, the Man and the Soldier. (New York: Bonanza Books, 1963), 253.
- <sup>16</sup>Robert E. Lee, Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee. (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1904), 198.
- <sup>17</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 636.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., 638.
- <sup>19</sup>Lee, Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee, 163.
- <sup>20</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 61, 63, 69, 82.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>22</sup>Walter C. Preston, Lee, West Point and Lexington. (Ohio: The Antioch Press, Publishers Yellow Springs, 1934), 9.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>24</sup>Charles D. Rhodes, Mrs. Robert S. Spilman, and George S. Wallace. Robert E. Lee, the West Pointer including Strafford Hall; the Lineage and Career of Robert E. Lee. (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, Publishers, 1932), 24-25.

<sup>25</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 43.

<sup>26</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 61.

<sup>27</sup>Fitzhugh Lee, General Lee, (New York: D. Appleton, 1895), 23.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>30</sup>Jones, Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man, 129.

<sup>31</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 64.

<sup>32</sup>Stephen R. Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 187, 222. .

<sup>33</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 46.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 68.

<sup>38</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 44.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Robert E. Lee, Letter to G. W. Custis Lee, from Arlington House, April 5, 1852, Letter is Unpublished and is retained at U.S. Military Academy Special Collections, Bldg. 2107, Pershing Center, West Point, NY

<sup>44</sup>Department of the Army, Guideposts for a Proud and Ready Army. (Washington: U.S. Department of the Army, 1 March 1985), 1.

<sup>45</sup>Emily V. Mason Popular Life of Gen. Robert Edward Lee. (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1872), 24-25.

<sup>46</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 30.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 41.

<sup>49</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 30-31.

<sup>50</sup>Edmund, Jennings Lee, Lee of Virginia. (Philadelphia: by Author, 1895; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), 349.

<sup>51</sup>Mary G. Powell, The History of Old Alexandria, Virginia from July 13, 1749 to May 24, 1861. (Virginia: The William Byrd Press, Inc., 1928), 154.

<sup>52</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 36.

<sup>53</sup>Jones, Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man, 24.

<sup>54</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 40.

<sup>55</sup>Mason, Popular Life of Gen. Robert Edward Lee, 25.

<sup>56</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 42.

<sup>57</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, On War. (Translated and edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 100.

<sup>58</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 42.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>61</sup>Albert A. Robers, "Family Live in Eighteenth Century Virginia." (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1939), 287-288.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 21.

<sup>64</sup>Clifford Dowdey, The Virginia Dynasties, the Emergence of "King" Carter and the Golden Age. (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1969) 18.

<sup>65</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 26.

<sup>66</sup>Clifford Dowdey, The Virginia Dynasties, the Emergence of "King" Carter and the Golden Age, 18-19.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>69</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 29.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>71</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 26-27.

<sup>72</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 37.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>74</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 42.

<sup>75</sup>Robers, "Family Live in Eighteenth Century Virginia," 28.

<sup>76</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 30.

<sup>77</sup>Robers, "Family Live in Eighteenth Century Virginia," 255.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 280.

<sup>80</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 30.

<sup>81</sup>Robers, "Family Live in Eighteenth Century Virginia," 286.

<sup>82</sup>Lee, General Lee, 6.

<sup>83</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 37.

<sup>84</sup>Walter C. Preston. Lee, West Point and Lexington. (Ohio: The Antioch Press, Publishers Yellow Springs, 1934), 7.

<sup>85</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 27-28.

- <sup>86</sup>Ibid., 26.
- <sup>87</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 29.
- <sup>88</sup>Ibid.
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- <sup>90</sup>Ibid., 40-41.
- <sup>91</sup>J. F. C. Fuller. Grant and Lee, A Study in Personality and Leadership. (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), 102.
- <sup>92</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 19.
- <sup>93</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 21.
- <sup>94</sup>Lee, General Lee, 1.
- <sup>95</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 20.
- <sup>96</sup>Lee, General Lee, 6.
- <sup>97</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>98</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 22.
- <sup>99</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>100</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 12.
- <sup>101</sup>Lee, General Lee, 2.
- <sup>102</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 3.
- <sup>103</sup>Lee, General Lee, 7.
- <sup>104</sup>Jones, Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man, 17.
- <sup>105</sup>Ibid., 18.
- <sup>106</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>107</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 9.
- <sup>108</sup>Lee, General Lee, 16.
- <sup>109</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 4.

- <sup>110</sup>Lee, General Lee, 21.
- <sup>111</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 16.
- <sup>112</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 6-7.
- <sup>113</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 10.
- <sup>114</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 7.
- <sup>115</sup>Ibid., 13.
- <sup>116</sup>Ibid., 2.
- <sup>117</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 32.
- <sup>118</sup>Jones, Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man, 19.
- <sup>119</sup>Feeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 16.
- <sup>120</sup>Powell, The History of Old Alexandria, Virginia from July 13, 1749 to May 24, 1861, 176.
- <sup>121</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 38.
- <sup>122</sup>Ibid., 31.
- <sup>123</sup>Lee, General Lee, 20.
- <sup>124</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 32.
- <sup>125</sup>Ibid., 24.
- <sup>126</sup>Ibid., 4.
- <sup>127</sup>Mason, Popular Life of Gen. Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man, 22.
- <sup>128</sup>Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 23.
- <sup>129</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 29.
- <sup>130</sup>Ibid., 30.
- <sup>131</sup>Ibid., 29.
- <sup>132</sup>Ibid., 32.
- <sup>133</sup>Edmund, Jennings Lee, Lee of Virginia, 343.
- <sup>134</sup>Ibid.

- <sup>135</sup>Ibid., 344.
- <sup>136</sup>Ibid., 345-346.
- <sup>137</sup>Ibid., 346.
- <sup>138</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>139</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 38.
- <sup>140</sup>Ibid., 31.
- <sup>141</sup>Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee, 30.
- <sup>142</sup>Powell, The History of Old Alexandria, Virginia from July 13, 1749 to May 24, 1861, 286.
- <sup>143</sup>Jones, Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man, 25.
- <sup>144</sup>Dowdey, Lee, 40.
- <sup>145</sup>Jones, Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man, 25.
- <sup>146</sup>Ibid., 36.
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CHAPTER 4  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

My purpose in conducting this study was to learn what influences in Robert E. Lee's early life helped to form his moral character that was the main ingredient of his great inspirational leadership. In summarizing this goal, I determined that Robert E. Lee's moral character was instilled in him by his mother very early in his formative years. From the ages of two until three and from age six onward, Robert was raised without the physical assistance of his father. It was Robert's mother who raised him, and she raised him in the same manner and customs under which she was reared. A letter written by his father when Robert was ten years old is the earliest evidence that documents Lee's strong character development as it occurred early in his formative years. Moreover, considerable character ethic evidence exists from those who personally knew Lee during his teenage years in Alexandria, and as he grew and matured through his graduation from West Point.

Throughout this study, it became very apparent to me that Robert was raised under a deliberate and conscious moral plan by his mother. Her duty in raising her children was to first instill character and then teach intellectual skills. She raised her children in the Christian manner of the era, and it was evident that she used time-

honored Aristotelian principles as her model. Throughout this study, I learned that Robert was raised in the very manner his mother was raised; she inculcated in him her family heritage and the traditions that were implanted in her. Moreover, although the primary influence on Robert's moral growth was the result of his mother's teachings and modeling, his father influenced his moral development indirectly through his writings and ironically through his character faults. Robert never really knew his father except what was told to him by his mother and other close family members. In my mind, it is doubtless that Mrs. Lee would share the contents of her husband's letters with Robert in a manner that would instill in him the many virtues that his father espoused in those letters.

Throughout this study I sensed that the Lee and Carter family values, more than the community, were what influenced Robert's character ethic most. Robert's mother acted as a filter to control what was poured into his character mold, and she acted as a loving tutor who shaped those moral ingredients into moral virtues through habit and practice. Her heritage, teachings, and modeling, affected Robert's moral growth more than the Alexandria, Virginia, society, which included recent memories of George Washington and other revolutionary war heroes.

Finally, I was unable to determine if Robert participated in any formal religious studies in the Alexandria schools or at West Point. However, at West Point his training included mentoring, and although his mentor's primary purpose was to teach military skills, it was implied that his duties would include modeling ethical behavior. Thus, in this manner, Robert and his peers would "catch" ethical traits, the very same

method today's Army expects to transmit moral values to its junior leaders.

### Conclusions

The following provides my conclusions to the six original reasons for this research project as described in Chapter One. However, before I address them, I ask the reader to allow me to digress for a moment to share three examples that give further insight into just how powerful Robert E. Lee's moral influence was on the battlefield. In doing this, I will provide evidence that lends support to two of General Scott's beliefs concerning General Lee's capabilities before, during, and after the Civil War. The first two incidents occurred immediately after the Army of Northern Virginia had surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse. The third example uses what General Grant said of Lee during his round the world voyage and is often quoted by Lee critics to support a contrary view of General Lee's military intellect.

The first involves a conversation that took place between General Lee and General Meade on the afternoon of the day of the surrender. Meade made a friendly visit to Lee's headquarters, and in the course of his conversation he remarked to Lee: "Now that the war may be considered over, I hope you will not deem it improper for me to ask, for my personal information, the strength of your army during the operations about Richmond and Petersburg." General Lee's reply was, "At no time did my forces exceed 35,000 men; often it was less." General Meade exhibited a look of surprise on his face and answered, "General, you amaze me! We always estimated your force at about 70,000 men."<sup>1</sup>

Given what General Meade said concerning the size of Lee's Army, you may recall from Chapter Three that before the war, General Scott believed "Robert Lee would be worth fifty thousand men"<sup>2</sup> to the North; Meade's numbers of Lee's strength leading to Appomattox roughly reflect the numerical difference that General Scott predicted. Moreover, what is remarkable here is that the North had spies everywhere, but the spirit and soul of Lee's Army portrayed it to be much stronger and larger than it really was. Its spirit came from their leader, and this spirit is also exhibited in the next example.

The second incident occurred immediately after Lee had completed surrender talks with Grant and was returning to his troops. This event further attests to the influence of Lee's character ethic and provides testimony that Robert E. Lee was a model for the kind of leadership characteristics that George Washington deemed necessary in order to carry out war systematically.

When, after his interview with Grant, General Lee again appeared [before his soldiers], a shout of welcome instinctively ran through the army. But instantly recollecting the sad occasion that brought him before them, their shouts sank into silence, every hat was raised, and the bronzed faces of the thousands of grim warriors were bathed with tears.

As he rode slowly along the lines hundreds of his devoted veterans pressed around the noble chief, trying to take his hand, touch his person, or even lay a hand upon his horse, thus exhibiting for him their great affection. The general then, with head bare and tears flowing freely down his manly cheeks, bade adieu to the army. In a few words he told the brave men who had been so true in arms to return to their homes and become worthy citizens.<sup>3</sup>

My third example gives insight into Lee's military intellect as seen through the eyes of one of the great commanders who faced him during the war. Grant reveals this assessment on Lee as it relates to the many Southern leaders he faced during the war:

I never ranked Lee so high as some others in the army; that is to say I never had so much anxiety when he was in my front as when Joe Johnston was in front. Lee was a good man, a fair commander . . . He was almost too old for active service--the best service in the field.<sup>4</sup>

Fuller used the above statement by Grant and mentioned the following to support his belief that Lee was more a great myth than a great man: "I can not help feeling that the most fervent admirer of Lee must agree that on the face of it sounds more honest than those others I have quoted."<sup>5</sup> In my view, Grant's statement and Fuller's thesis further corroborate Lee's character ethic as it relates to his greatness, and I will explain why in my first recommendation for further research at the end of this chapter.

In addressing my concluding remarks as they relate to the importance of this study, General Lee's character ethic was the result of his mother's efforts to inculcate in him her long-held family virtues from the earliest moments of his life. Through this study, it became very apparent that in Lee's case, his moral virtues were the result of habits.

Moreover, this study strongly supports the historical significance of Aristotle's teachings as they relate to virtues and habits and developing moral character early in one's life. It also endorses Clausewitz's theory on military genius. Lee was a man who led his men through his spiritual leadership. They saw in him a true leader, one who transcended physical, mental, and spiritual boundaries. In the end, his men were not fighting for their country, they were fighting and dying for him. The only true influence Lee had on anyone else is by the way he lived his life, how he acted, and what he did. His Army saw in him a reflection of what they most desired in

themselves; his character ethic represented an honorable, trustworthy, humble, and ethical man whose only goal in life was to serve them and their nation.

I believe the stories I have related here show that Robert E. Lee was an inspirational leader; his inspiration was derived from his character ethic; his character ethic showed that even in the darkest and most desperate of moments it allowed him never to waiver but remain focused on his moral principles, and his nation's goals. Lee's moral principles showed through his Army's worst moments and inspired his men. Their emotional connection with him and their subsequent sacrifices were the result of what he learned to signify from his heritage, traditions, and virtues that his mother imparted to him.

As a final note, an area of controversy arises in this study as it relates to duty. The definition of duty in today's Army differs from the duty which was taught in Lee's era. Today, duty implies a downward obligation and only a sense of obligation within the chain of command and within the Army organization. During Lee's time, the term duty implied an upward obligation to the laws of God and society in general. It included an obligation to do one's best in everything attempted in life. Thus, it was a mother's duty to raise her children in a Christian manner and with special emphasis put on developing moral character in her children. Furthermore, it was a duty to be civil in society, to respect others, to assist one in need, and as noted in Chapter Three, in Lee's advice as it related to his definition of duty to his son, "Duty, then, is the sublimest word in our language. Do your duty in all things . . . You cannot do more; you should never wish to do less.

Never let me and your mother wear one gray hair for any lack of duty on your part." With this definition of duty as a guidepost, it is doubtless that doing one's duty during Lee's era likely rated next to the principle of honor. Thus, it was the next most important of all the virtues in one's character.

Finally, this study adds to the body of historical knowledge in a way that I have found in no other references on Lee. I believe the serious military student and leader may use the information contained here to provide greater insight into the other half of the leadership model. That other half is what Washington and Clausewitz both mentioned in their respective periods as being very necessary to carry out war. It is my experience, thus far in the Army, that the power of moral character is often talked about with regard to leading soldiers, but its real impact on those we lead is little understood since the era of the great George Washington and Robert E. Lee.

#### Recommendations For Further Research

I sensed throughout this study that Lee was brought up in accordance with a moral plan. If General Lee was a man of only average military intellect as General Grant alluded to after the war, then Lee's presence and the power he held on the battlefield was accomplished through what Clausewitz described as the other half of military genius, his moral principles--his character-centered leadership.

Ethical training and the way we go about developing it in our children today is far different than the way it was instilled in the great leaders of our country during the era of this study. In Lee's time, Washington was held up as the ethical model.<sup>6</sup> Our Army today

still wants to "inculcate" moral character into our junior leaders in the same manner we attempted it in the early nineteenth century at West Point. If we consider what Aristotle taught about character and its relation to habits, then instilling moral character into junior leaders when they are in their late teens and early twenties would be a very difficult task, especially if they were not exposed to good moral habits in their formative years. So for me, the question begs to be asked: Are the inculcation method and the current moral teaching plans we currently use today effective enough in our Army? The implied results of this study say no, or else we would be seeing leaders such as Washington and Lee in our society since their era. Something basic has changed in the way we are or are not instilling habits in our children and future leaders in our society as it relates to moral character growth.

I therefore recommend the following areas for further research. First, is a plan for attaining moral perfection as described by Benjamin Franklin in his autobiography applicable to today's Army and to our society? (Franklin was no ordinary man when he wrote and thought about this plan. He was a Founding Father, a sage, a man the Founders of our country thought enough of to send to France as their first Ambassador to gain French assistance in our fight for Independence and whose efforts paid off at York Town, and whose moral recognition to this nation was exposed to Robert E. Lee during his studies at West Point.) Franklin said the following about his moral plan: "I am still of opinion that it was a practicable [plan], and might have been very useful, by forming a great number of good citizens."<sup>7</sup> He also said "I have always thought

that one man of tolerable abilities may work great changes, and accomplish great affairs among mankind, if he first forms a good [moral] plan . . . [and] makes the execution of that same plan his sole study and business."<sup>8</sup>

Second, how do moral and ethical trends in America's society affect the professional Army ethic?

Third, do modern senior military leaders who are not committed to Judeo-Christian ethic and value systems affect the professional Army ethic?

And fourth, does our professional Army ethic, as it relates to "Duty," retain the same implied values that were expected of the leaders in Robert E. Lee's era?

In summary, throughout this chapter, I have explained the key influences in Robert E. Lee's early life that helped form his moral character and shape Lee as a great leader on and off the battlefield. His character ethic was the direct result of his mother's efforts to instill virtues and habits in him early in his life. This allowed Lee's mother to fulfill her duty in passing on her family heritage and traditions as they related to character development. Lee, in turn, exhibited those early learned moral habits throughout his life in the way his interdependent leadership moved men and moved a nation.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Armistead Lindsay Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee. (New York, Philadelphia: Jim Stoddart, 1886) 426.

<sup>2</sup>Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee, 92.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 423-424.

<sup>4</sup>J. F. C. Fuller. Grant and Lee, A Study in Personality and Leadership. (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), 109.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>6</sup>Edmund Jennings Lee, Lee of Virginia. (Philadelphia: by Author, 1895; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), 345-346.

<sup>7</sup>Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1939), 110.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

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