

Banquet Honoring Generals Lee and Jackson

General Robert E. Lee was born January 19, 1807, at Stratford Hall, Virginia. General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson was born January 21, 1824, at Clarksburg, Virginia. These two Virginians became officers in the United States Army, distinguished themselves in service to their country during the War with Mexico, chose to defend their homeland during the War of Southern Independence and are considered worldwide to be two of the greatest military leaders the world has known.

Jackson died of wounds May 10, 1863, and is buried in Jackson Cemetery in Lexington, Virginia.

Lee died October 12, 1870; five years after the war ended and is buried in Lee Chapel on the campus of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.

The officers and members of the 16th Regiment, South Carolina

Volunteers, Sons of Confederate Veterans, Camp 36 hosted the Annual Lee-Jackson Banquet at the Airport Marriott Hotel honoring the two legendary generals.

Mark A. Simpson, Commander of the South Carolina Division, Sons of Confederate Veterans, was the featured speaker. Commander Simpson discussed the outstanding service of the two US Army officers prior to the secession of their beloved Virginia from the Union. Both served with distinction during the Spanish American War under the command of General Winfield Scott.

Simpson described the historical account of how Lt. Jackson fearlessly stood in the open with feet spread apart, and bullets passing between his legs, urging his troops to move forward. With all horses pulling his artillery pieces killed, he moved one gun to high ground and held off the entire Mexican Army for a period of time, refusing an order to retreat.

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At a reception held by General Scott for his officers following the capture of Mexico City, Simpson describes a surprise toast.
Hits: 6532

“Jackson eagerly attempted to get an up-close view of the Living Legend who commanded American Forces. Obviously Jackson had never met Gen. Scott. Jackson was moving dutifully through the receiving line as he waited his turn to be introduced to the commander.

“‘Lieutenant Jackson,’ Said the General as he drew himself to full height, placing his hands behind his back proclaimed in a loud commanding voice: ‘I don’t know if I will shake hands with this gentleman.’

“Silence spread over the hall and all eyes turned to the blushing young Lieutenant. ‘You can forgive yourself for the way in which you slaughtered those poor Mexicans. I am not sure that I can.’

“Jackson felt a rush of humiliation pass through him as he saw Gen. Scott’s hand thrust toward him. Suddenly he held Scott’s massive right hand while a warm smile of respect and affection spread across the commanding general’s face. Jackson shook Scott’s hand as applause filled the room. An officer in attendance was quoted saying: ‘No greater compliment could have been paid a young officer.’

“Singled out above all others, Scott gives Jackson the highest praise.”

As the banquet progressed, Gen. Scott rose and proposed a toast honoring a Captain in his command. Commander Simpson asked the officers and members of the 16th Regiment and their guests in Greenville to stand and raise their glasses as he read the toast proposed by Gen. Scott at the end of the war with Mexico.

“I ask you, gentlemen, to pledge me in the health of Captain Robert E. Lee without whose aid we should not be.”

Banquet Honoring Generals Lee and Jackson

Simpson continued: "To the memory of two great American heroes, the lives and character that they represent even for us today, may we as Southern people and Americans never forget to give them honor, never allowing a disparaging comment, for as long as we are a free people or ever after that as long as we have life and breath, shall we always remember to give honor to Robert Edward Lee, Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Commander of the Confederate Army and Lieutenant General Thomas Jonathan 'Stonewall' Jackson.

" Scott praised Lee in an official letter: 'Lee was the very best soldier I ever saw in the field.' Scott had said it would be cheap if the United States could insure the life of Robert E. Lee for \$5 million dollars.

"In 1861, General Scott informed President Lincoln that Gen. Lee would be worth the equivalent of 2 divisions to the Union.

"As the Southern States begin to leave the Union, Lincoln sends Francis Blair to ask Gen. Lee to take command of the United States Army."

Lee's response is a matter of history. He turned down command of the United States Army offered by the President of the United States to use his sword in defense of his beloved Commonwealth of Virginia.

Commander Simpson explained that this was a major decision for a career officer to turn down the assignment he and all career generals strive for. Lee knew the road ahead would be rough and the outcome uncertain, but he was a man of honor and principle and for Lee that came before personal glory or career considerations.

Lee and Jackson are used as examples of military leaders to emulate in top military schools throughout the world. It is tragic that political correctness and regional jealousy has prevented a generation of young Americans from knowing the truth about these truly great Americans.

President Eisenhower was asked why he had a large picture of Robert E. Lee hanging on the wall of the Oval Office. The President responded in a letter.

"General Robert E. Lee was, in my consideration, one of the supremely gifted men produced by our Nation. He believed unswervingly in the Constitutional validity of his cause which until 1865 was still an arguable question in America; he was thoughtful yet demanding of his officers and men, forbearing with captured enemies but ingenious, unrelenting and personally courageous in battle, and never disheartened by a reverse or obstacle. Through all his many trials, he remained selfless almost to a fault and unflinching in his belief in God. Taken all together, he was noble as a leader and as a man, and unsullied as I read the pages of our history.

"From deep conviction, I simply say this: A nation of men of Lee's character would be unconquerable in spirit and soul. Indeed, to the degree that present-day American youth will strive

Banquet Honoring Generals Lee and Jackson

to emulate his rare qualities, including his devotion to this land as revealed in his painstaking efforts to help heal the nation's wounds once the bitter struggle was over, we, in our own time of danger in a divided world, will be strengthened and our love of freedom sustained.

"Such are the reasons that I proudly display the picture of this great American on my office wall."

Sincerely,

Dwight D. Eisenhower