

Robert E. Lee Arrives in Western Virginia **<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

On Thursday, August 1, 1861, General Robert E. Lee arrived in Western Virginia under orders from Jefferson Davis to pull the disorganized forces in that region together more cohesively. Lee took command from W.W. Loring who had replaced Brigadier General Robert Garnett after Garnett's death at Corrick's Ford several weeks earlier.

Lee was of noble military lineage and a member of one of Virginia's grand families. He was born in 1807 at Stratford Hall Plantation in Virginia and was the son of famed Revolutionary War general and later Virginia governor Henry Lee III. His mother grew up on Shirley Plantation, one of the most beautiful mansions in the South. Robert E. Lee entered West Point in 1825 and graduated as a second lieutenant in 1829.

Like all graduates of West Point at the time, Lee's studies were devoted to engineering and for the next 17 years he worked on a variety of projects around the United States and worked his way up to the rank of Captain of Engineers. In 1846, the United States went to war with Mexico and Lee made his mark. As an aide to commander Winfield Scott, his reconnaissance was a key factor in several U.S. victories. Lee was involved in major combat for the first time and in a strange twist, he worked alongside future adversary Ulysses S. Grant on several occasions.

After the war ended in 1848, Lee spent several more years supervising military engineering projects before taking over as superintendent at West Point in 1852. Although Lee dutifully improved the facilities at West Point and did a commendable job supervising the

students, he yearned for more action. That chance came in 1855 when he was promoted and transferred from the Engineering corps to the Cavalry and served in Texas protecting settlers from Apaches and Comanches. In 1859, he was in command of the forces that attacked and captured abolitionist John Brown at Harper's Ferry.

In early 1861, as Civil War loomed on the horizon, Lee was in high demand. He remained loyal to the Union and turned down an offer to command the Confederate forces. His former commander, Winfield Scott, who was now in charge of the entire U.S. Army, promoted Lee to Colonel. Lee remained loyal until April when it became obvious that his home state of Virginia would secede. He resigned his U.S. commission on April 20. Lee was at first put in command of all Virginia forces on April 23, but as the Confederate Army took shape he was named one of five full generals.

So, as Lee arrived in Northwestern Virginia in the summer of 1861 he was well known in both North and South as an accomplished soldier and Mexican War hero. His first command of the war, however, would give little evidence of the greatness to come in later years of the war.