



Rebel Underground

Sons of Confederate Veterans
Major John C. Hutto Camp #443
Jasper, Alabama

Published Monthly

October 2024

The Major John C. Hutto Camp's October camp meeting
will be in Jasper, Alabama on

Sunday, 20 October 2024 at 2:00PM

Meeting will be at the
First Methodist Church's Adult Center

Speaker - Dr. Brandon Beck

If you want to know what happened at Fort Dixie this year,
check out September's excellent newsletter article,

Celebration of the Lives of Lt. Gen. Forrest
And Butch Godwin
by Faye Gaston

Robert E. Lee: "I Declined the Offer"
William Connery
September 30, 2024



Robert E. Lee as he would have appeared when making his decision to resign at Arlington in 1861 | NPS

In March 1861, Robert E. Lee met with Gen. Winfield Scott at the United States War Department. For three hours, the old general and his favorite subordinate spoke together. What was said during that conversation was never revealed. But Scott's known opinion to secession—despite being from Virginia—his admiration for Lee, and his desire to assure strong leadership for the army allow us to reasonably reconstruct part of the dialogue. Scott likely told Lee that he would soon be promoted to colonel and hinted that, should Scott himself be too feeble to take the field, he would recommend Lee as his second-in-command. If Lee responded to Scott's overtures, it was probably with the sentiment that if Virginia seceded, he would follow her, as he considered his primary obligation to be to his state. When Lee left, it was reported that Scott's manner was "painfully silent."

About the same time Lee got a letter written dated March 15 from LeRoy Pope Walker, the Confederate States of America's Secretary of War. This letter was a direct offer of a commission as brigadier general—the highest rank then authorized—in the army the South was forming. The letter read: "You are requested to signify your acceptance or non-acceptance of said appointment, and should you accept, you will sign before a magistrate the

oath of office herewith and forward the same, with your letter of acceptance to this office.” After many years of slow promotion, honors were now coming quickly: a colonelcy in one army and a generalship in the rival service. There is no record of Lee’s reply to this offer from the Confederacy, but it is likely he ignored it. What is certain is that he was not enticed by the promise of high position. Lee felt allegiance to only two governments: that of Virginia and that of the Union. As long as these two entities did not conflict, and as long as Virginia did not join the Confederacy, there was no thought of a third.

Arlington, Washington City P.O.
20 Apr 1861

St. Gen Winfield Scott
Command. U.S. Army

Dear Sir

Since my interview with you on the 18th Inst: I have felt that I ought not longer to hold any Commission in the Army. I therefore present my resignation which I ~~trust~~ you will command for acceptance. It would have been presented at an earlier date for the struggle it has cost me to separate myself from a service to which I have devoted all the best years of my life, & all the ability I possessed. Having, at that time, more ^{of a general's spirit} than I have ~~at present~~ ^{at present} nothing but kindness & consideration from my superiors & the most cordial friendships from my ^{Comrades} ~~Comrades~~: I do so ^{with} ~~with~~ as much indebtedness to yourself ^{as to} ~~as to~~ for kindness & consideration, & it has always been my ardent desire to merit your approbation. I shall always with me ^{to the office} ~~to the office~~ be the most grateful recollection of your kind consideration, & your name ^{will} ~~will~~ always be dear to me. It is pleasant to recall any most valued wishes for the continuance of your happiness & prosperity, believe me

most truly yours
R. Lee

Lee's resignation letter to Winfield Scott | NPS

By March 28, Lee had been promoted to full colonel in the U.S. Army and had taken the oath of allegiance to the U.S. Constitution. On the morning of April 18, with no news yet from the Virginia Secession Convention in Richmond, Lee rode over the bridge to visit Francis Preston Blair, whose home stood across the street from the Presidential Mansion. Blair promptly explained his reason for the meeting. A large army, he said, would soon be called into the field,

and President Lincoln had authorized him to ask Lee if he would accept the command.

This was a significant offer: command of an army of 75,000, perhaps even 100,000 men; the chance to apply all he had learned in Mexico; the realization of a soldier's highest ambition; the full support of the government; the companionship of many of his most capable comrades; and the rank of major general. Yet Lee's response was clear: "If the Union is dissolved and the government disrupted, I shall return to my native state and share the miseries of my people and save in her defense, I will draw my sword on no one." There he made the fateful reply he later recounted of the interview: "I declined the offer he made me to take command of the army that was to be brought into the field, stating as candidly and as courteously as I could, that though opposed to secession and deprecating war, I could take no part in an invasion of the Southern States."

Bidding farewell to Blair, Lee went directly to General Scott's office. He sensed Scott's deep interest in his decision, and as soon as he had arrived, he told him what Blair had offered and his subsequent refusal. "Lee," said Scott, deeply moved, "you have made the greatest mistake of your life, but I feared it would be so."

That was all, as far as Lee was concerned. He had long before decided, instinctively, what his duty required, and the allure of supreme command, with all that a soldier craved, did not tempt him to equivocate for an instant or to see if there were not some way he could keep his own honor and still have the honor he understood the president had offered him.



It was in this room at Arlington where Lee informed his family that he had resigned. | NPS

William Connery, aka The History Guy, is the author of *Civil War Northern Virginia 1861* and *Mosby's Raids in Civil War Northern Virginia*.

HUTTO CAMP OFFICERS

Commander	James R. Blackston
1 st Lt. Cmd	Trent Harris
2nd Lt. Cmd	Jeremy Jackson
Adjutant	John McGraw
Chaplain	Barry Cook
Judge Advocate	Cherokee Brasher
Communications	Barry Cook
Facebook	Brandon Prescott - Jeremy Jackson
Quartermaster	Barry Cook
Newsletter Editor	James Blackston

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