

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUGUST 5, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
SIGNING CEREMONY FOR S.J. RES. 23,
RESTORATION OF CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS
TO GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE

LEE MANSION
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

2:12 P.M. EDT

Governor Godwin, Senator Byrd, Congressman Butler, Congressman Harris, Congressman Satterfield, Congressman Downing and Congressman Daniel, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am very pleased to sign Senate Joint Resolution 23 restoring posthumously the long overdue full rights of citizenship to General Robert E. Lee. This legislation corrects a 110 year oversight of American history. It is significant that it is signed at this place.

Lee's dedication to his native State of Virginia chartered his course for the bitter Civil War years causing him to reluctantly resign from a distinguished career in the United States Army and to serve as General of the Army of Northern Virginia. He, thus, forfeited his right to U.S. citizenship.

Once the war was over, he firmly felt the wounds of the North and South must be bound up. He sought to show by example that the citizens of the South must dedicate their efforts to rebuilding that region of the country as a strong and vital part of the American Union.

In 1865, Robert E. Lee wrote to a former Confederate soldier concerning his signing the Oath of Allegiance, and I quote, "This war, being at an end, the Southern States having laid down their arms, and the questions at issue between them and the Northern States having been decided, I believe it to be the duty of everyone to unite in the restoration of the country and the reestablishment of peace and harmony."

MORE

This resolution passed by the Congress responds to the formal application of General Lee to President Andrew Johnson on June 13, 1865, for the restoration of his full right of citizenship.

Although this petition was endorsed by General Grant and forwarded to the President through the Secretary of War, an Oath of Allegiance was not attached because notice of this additional requirement had not reached Lee in time.

Later, after his inauguration as President of Washington College on October 2, 1865, Lee executed a notarized Oath of Allegiance. Again his application was not acted upon because the Oath of Allegiance was apparently lost. It was finally discovered in the National Archives in 1970.

As a soldier General Lee left his mark on military strategy. As a man he stood as the symbol of valor and of duty. As an educator, he appealed to reason and learning to achieve understanding and to build a stronger nation. The course he chose after the war became a symbol to all those who had marched with him in the bitter years towards Appomattox.

General Lee's character has been an example to succeeding generations, making the restoration of his citizenship an event in which every American can take pride.

In approving this Joint Resolution, the Congress removed the legal obstacle to citizenship which resulted from General Lee's Civil War service. Although more than a century late, I am delighted to sign this Resolution and to complete the full restoration of General Lee's citizenship.

END (AT 2:17 P.M. EDT)