

Following written by Carl Jones

Robert E Lee is one of very few cadets to pass through the US Military Academy at West Point without a single demerit. In the Mexican War General Winfield Scott called him

“the greatest soldier I’ve ever seen.”

As an Army Engineer he re-routed the Mississippi River and saved the city of St Louis. When he inherited slaves from his father in law, he educated them and set them free, and he referred to slavery as “a political and moral evil”. He turned down Lincoln’s offer to Command the US Army that would invade the South and his home State of Virginia even though leading that Army would have certainly brought him international fame and likely the presidency.

He instead offered his sword to Virginia and fought against that invasion for four years leading an Army that was vastly outnumbered, out supplied and out fed. After the war, as the most beloved figure on either side of the war, he turned down all of the opportunities that would have enriched him by refusing to sell his family name.

He chose instead to take a job with meager pay at Washington College because he knew that rebuilding the country meant that we needed to raise men of high honor and character. His first act as President of the College was to build a Chapel. On Lee’s last visit to Richmond, a lady approached General Lee with an infant in her arms and asked “Would you please hold my baby?” General Lee took the child, looked the woman in the eye and said

“you must teach him to deny himself.”

Biographer Douglas Southall Freeman pointed out that this one statement characterized the entirety of how General Lee lived.

As the end of his life was approaching Robert E Lee was asked, with all of his accomplishments, what should his headstone say. He answered “that I am a poor sinner, trusting in Christ alone for my salvation.”