

IN WAR AND IN PEACE

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As the sun rose slowly over Mount Vernon on December 12, 1799, a cold and wintry day was revealed. Aside from periods of rain, sleet, and snow, it seemed like a normal day. Indeed, no one could have foreseen that this day would lead to the death of a great American hero.

Undaunted by the bad weather, Lieutenant General George Washington, retired from the presidency for nearly two years, set out on his daily horseback ride around his 500-acre Virginia estate, Mount Vernon. The harsh weather beat down on Washington, but he continued to ride. After five hours in the cold, he returned to his house and sat down to dinner without even changing his damp clothes. His close friend and secretary Tobias Lear later commented that chunks of snow rested in Washington's hair while he ate.¹

It continued to snow through the next day. Washington began to develop a cold and a sore throat from being out the day before, so he did not go on his usual rounds. Lear observed an increasingly worse hoarseness in his speech as the day progressed.² At night, Washington and Lear sat down in the parlor to read.

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When Washington left the room to go to bed, Lear advised that he take some medicine to get rid of his cold. Washington turned to Lear and replied, "You know I never take anything for a cold. Let it go as it came."³

Between two and three o'clock on the morning of the 14th, Washington woke his wife to tell her that he was very ill. He breathed with great difficulty as he instructed her not to notify anyone until dawn.

Thus, it was not until Mount Vernon was fully awake that its inhabitants learned of Washington's condition. Three doctors were sent for. The first, Dr. James Craik, had been Washington's friend and doctor since he was a young man. The other two doctors, Dr. Brown and Dr. Dick were called at Craik's request.⁴ Washington was diagnosed with a throat infection known as "inflammatory quinsy."⁵ After a number of futile attempts at bleeding him, it seemed that the doctors could do nothing. Craik took a seat by the fireplace in Washington's room, and there he sat in despair for the rest of the day.

Finally, Washington, barely able to speak, told the three doctors, "I feel myself going. You had better not take any more trouble about me."⁶ Hours later, the first President of the United States died at the age of 67.

Riders were dispatched the next morning to carry the solemn news. Throughout the world people were saddened by Washington's death. Indeed, between the December that he died and February of the following year, more than 300 eulogies, in over 185 towns, would be given in praise of George Washington.⁷ From as close as Alexandria and as far away as France and England people mourned for and extolled the remarkable man.

When the news of Washington's death reached Congress in Philadelphia on December 18, Congress adjourned immediately.⁸ Five days later, on December 23, it issued a joint resolution regarding the death of the ex-president. The resolution called for the establishment of a monument in memory of Washington, and also named the capitol of the United States after him. But it is to

the second section of the resolution that this paper directs its immediate attention:

And be it further resolved, That there be a funeral procession from Congress Hall to the German Lutheran Church, in memory of General George Washington, on Thursday, the 26th instant, and that an oration be prepared at the request of Congress, to be delivered before both Houses on that day; and that the President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives, be desired to request one of the Members of Congress to prepare and deliver the same.⁹

As history would have it, the man chosen to deliver this oration would be Washington's old and loyal friend, Henry "Lighthorse Harry" Lee.¹⁰

Much is known about the life of George Washington. He was born on February 22, 1732 in Westmoreland County, Virginia. Washington belonged to an old colonial family that believed in hard work, in public service, and in worshipping God. He received little formal education, leaving school after only eight years. But Washington was an avid reader, especially in the field of military history. He showed some aptitude in surveying and simple mathematics. Also, Washington developed a style of speech that, although not always polished, was marked by clarity and force.

Washington was by no means a military or political genius, but was a practical man with a number of developed talents. These talents would lead him to fight in the French and Indian War, command the Continental army in the American War for Independence, serve as president of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, and finally become the first President of the United States of America.

In 1759, some time before he became an important American figure, Washington married Mrs. Martha Dandridge Custis. The two would remain together until the end of Washington's life.

But Martha was not the only woman Washington ever loved. In 1748, eleven years before he married Martha, Washington wrote letters to three friends in which he professed his love for a certain "Lowland Beauty." The identity of the Lowland Beauty is unknown, but much evidence suggests that she was Ms. Lucy

Grymes.¹² Grymes passed up the opportunity to marry Washington, instead marrying Mr. Henry Lee. Lee and his wife had four sons, the eldest of whom was Henry “Lighthorse Harry” Lee.¹³

Lee was born on January 29, 1756 in Lessylvania, Virginia.¹⁴ He earned the nickname “Lighthorse Harry” for his frequent success as a scout and in making lightning raids.

The Lee family of Virginia was a large and prominent family. Henry Lee’s cousins, Francis Lightfoot Lee and Richard Henry Lee were both leaders in the protests against the Stamp Act and were signers of the Declaration of Independence. In fact, it was Richard Henry Lee who wrote the first resolution for independence for the American colonies, which served as the basis for Jefferson’s document.

Henry Lee later had a son, Robert E. Lee, who would lead the Confederate army in the Civil War.

“Lighthorse Harry” was educated at the College of New Jersey (Princeton University). In August 1770, a friend of the Lee family, Dr. William Shippen, wrote to Richard Henry Lee: “I am persuaded that there is not such a school as Princeton on this continent. Your cousin Henry Lee is in college, and will be one of the first fellows of his country. He is more than strict in his morality, has a fine genius, and is diligent.”¹⁵

In the course of his lifetime, Henry Lee played major roles in the military and in politics. Before serving as governor of Virginia and as a member of Congress, Lee fought for independence, in the American Revolution. He became a captain in the Virginia cavalry in 1776 and joined George Washington’s army the next year.

It is possible that Washington thought of Henry Lee as his son at times considering that Lee was the son of his former love, and that he had no children of his own. That may help to explain why the two men became so close. But there were many events and occurrences in their lives which strengthened the loyal bond between Washington and Lee, beginning with the American Revolution. Theirs was a friendship that would last through war and through peace.

Lee and Washington probably first discussed at length the possibility of an armed conflict with Great Britain after Washington returned to Mount Vernon from the First Continental Congress in 1774.¹⁶ During this time many Virginia leaders assembled to consider the matter. The men knew of the decision of the Continental Congress to assemble in May of the following year if the “Intolerable” (or ‘Coercive’ as they were called in Britain) Acts were not repealed, but the future remained unclear.

A month before the Second Continental Congress was to convene, the first shots of the war were fired at Lexington and Concord. Washington petitioned the Congress for the creation of a Continental army. After much debate it was agreed upon, and Washington was named commander in chief.

In 1778, a year after Lee and the Virginia cavalry joined the Continental army, Washington promoted Lee to the rank of major for valor in battle. He was placed in charge of a force of cavalry and infantry that became known as “Lee’s Legion.” This legion of “daredevil riders” was famous for its hit-and-run raids.¹⁷

Lee was one of Washington’s favorites.¹⁸ He was “brave, devoted, and very aggressive.”¹⁹ In 1779, the commander in chief selected him to lead a group in a raid on a British post at Powles (Paulus) Hook, NY. Many jealous officers protested Washington’s choice, and felt that a young man like Lee should not have been assigned to command his elders. But, “[Washington] praised Lee,” and ignored the complaints.²⁰

Lee captured Powles Hook on August 19, 1779. His raid is regarded as one of the most brilliant exploits of the American Revolution.

During times that Washington was pessimistic about the war effort, the thought of Lee’s talent often gave him hope.²¹ In 1780, Washington promoted him to the rank of lieutenant colonel. When, that same year, General Nathaniel Greene requested that the commander in chief send him his best supporting officers to help him in the Carolinas, Washington sent Lee. He covered Greene’s retreat across North Carolina to Virginia with his raids on the British. His campaigns in the south played a major role in the American victory.²²

Henry Lee reciprocated Washington's affection for him. Lee greatly admired and respected the man. Although in his memoirs of the Revolution, he never mentions his feelings for Washington, he does paint a certain picture of the man. He noted that the health, the comfort, and the labor of his army were more important to the commander in chief than his own well-being, and also that Washington "tenderly [provided] for the wounded."²³

In 1781, near the end of the Revolution, "Lighthorse Harry" resigned his commission because of ill health and went into retirement, with the intention of becoming a planter. For four years Lee visited Mount Vernon frequently, planting flowers and other "botanical novelties" in its gardens.²⁴ Finding it too boring, he came out of retirement in 1785 to become a member of the Continental Congress.²⁵ Meanwhile Washington was deeply worried about the weakness of the United States due to the lack of strong central power under the Articles of Confederation. He sent many letters to Lee expressing his discomfort. In 1786 Washington wrote: "I am mortified beyond expression when I view the clouds that have spread over the brightest morn that ever dawned upon any country."²⁶

The next year a Constitutional Convention was called for the purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation. George Washington sat as president of the convention. When the new Constitution was written and signed by the delegates, conventions were called in each state to review and ratify it. Henry Lee was a member of the Virginia convention. Washington was unsure whether Virginia would ratify the Constitution, but he was encouraged by the fact that young leaders like Henry Lee supported it. Washington "made common cause" with Lee, and the two men kept in close contact during this time.²⁷

The new, Constitution of the United States placed executive power into the hands of a President, who was to be elected by an Electoral College. Many people throughout the nation wanted Washington to run for the office. Unsure whether he should or not, Washington turned to his good friends, among whom was Henry "Lighthorse Harry" Lee. Lee gave Washington his support and urged him to run.²⁸

Once in office, Washington often sought advice from Lee. When the President began making appointments to his cabinet in September, 1789, Lee advised Washington on whom he should choose as his secretary of state.²⁹ Also, when Washington encountered conflicts within his cabinet he confided in Lee.³⁰ In 1791, Henry Lee became governor of the state of Virginia.

“Lighthorse Harry” valued Washington’s opinion as much as Washington valued his. When Edmond Charles Genet, a French foreign minister who came to the United States in 1793 to persuade the nation to declare war on Great Britain, offered Governor Lee a leadership position in the French army, Lee turned to his old friend for advice. Informed by Lee that he was leaning towards accepting Genet’s offer, Washington replied: “As a public character I am unable to say nothing on the subject. As a private man, I am unwilling to say much.” What he did tell Lee to do was to think twice before giving up his current position.³¹ Washington confided in Lee about his foreign policy problems caused by Genet. The President wanted to stay out of the war waging in Europe between Britain and France. When Genet tried to outfit warships in American ports and send them to sea against the British, Washington asked France to recall Genet because he endangered American neutrality. Genet was stripped of his power, but was allowed to stay in the United States. “[Washington] suspected, as he confided to [Lee], that Genet had been egged on by malcontents in the United States.”³²

In the summer of 1794 Washington faced another major challenge: the Whiskey Rebellion. Farmers in four counties in western Pennsylvania refused to pay federal taxes on whiskey. They armed themselves and attacked federal officials. The President raised 15,000 troops, from a number of states, and led them himself to western Pennsylvania. Under pressure from his cabinet to return to Philadelphia, Washington wrote to Attorney General Edmund Randolph, that if it seemed that there would soon be fighting, he would continue to lead the troops. “If not,” he wrote, “I shall place the command of the combined force under Governor Lee of Virginia and repair to the seat of government.”³³ Governor Lee was with Washington in western Pennsylvania,

leading the troops from Virginia. Washington put Lee in command and prepared to return to Philadelphia. Before his departure Washington surveyed the troops and reviewed the plans with Lee. He was encouraged by what he saw, and returned to Philadelphia a little more at ease.³⁴ By November 1794, the rebellion had been crushed and the ringleaders arrested. Henry Lee had come through for his friend once again.

By 1796 Washington was tired with public office and made plans for retirement. John Adams won the presidential election that year, and was inaugurated in March 1797. Washington happily returned to Mount Vernon, where he lived out the rest of his days.

During Washington's retirement at Mount Vernon, Lee purchased a piece of land from him on credit. He hoped to develop the land and reap the profits, but the land was "dismal swamp land," and Lee made no money.³⁵ Knowing that Washington desperately needed the money but that he could not provide it, Lee sent his friend a letter saying:

No event in my life has given me more anguish. I would prefer to relinquish the contract and lose all payments made than be the instrument of damage to you; the loss of money I am used to, the loss of mental quietude I cannot bear and pained as I am, I wish to regain tranquillity. Every conversation I hold with you on the subject furnishes additional matter of regret to me.³⁶

Washington was profoundly discontented by the matter for he was in need of the money. But he did not become hostile toward Lee. In 1798, in the last political election that Washington would ever vote in, he cast his ballot for Henry Lee for the House of Representatives.³⁷

On December 26, 1799, members of the Senate and the House of Representatives lined the street outside of Congress Hall in Philadelphia and marched in a funeral procession to the German Lutheran Church, in remembrance of the first President of the United States.

"After the organist had rendered a 'dead march and monody' written for the occasion by Benjamin Carr, Congressman

Henry Lee took the pulpit to speak. He was chosen for this honor because he had known Washington so long and so well.³⁸ That he was chosen to speak must have at least slightly eased his pain.³⁹

Before both houses of Congress Henry “Lighthorse Harry” Lee delivered his famous memorial address about George Washington:

First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life. Pious, just, humane, temperate and sincere – uniform, dignified and commanding – his example was as deifying to all around him as were the effects of that lasting example. Correct throughout, vice shuddered in his presence and virtue always felt his fostering hand. The purity of his private character gave effulgence to his public virtues. Such was the man for whom our nation mourns.⁴⁰

Was Washington really as Lee described him? Many attempts have been made to make him appear otherwise.⁴¹ But putting aside any challenges to his personal character, it can be agreed that Washington was a noteworthy man. “It was not until the ‘Father of his Country’ had become the glory of the world that it pleased Providence to remove him to a higher sphere.”⁴² It is no wonder that for years after Washington died toy clocks were sold with hands painted on the face indicating 10:20, the hour of his death.⁴³

Washington was first in war. As previously stated, Washington was not a military genius. He was never fluent in the language of war, but he “acquired a proficiency in the military art” during the American Revolution.⁴⁴ Perhaps what distinguished Washington most from other military heroes was that he had the respect of his men. He was not unapproachable, and communicated well with the soldiers.

The Continental army would have withered away and the American war effort would have collapsed if it were not for Washington’s perseverance. He did not give up when his troops were plagued by bitter cold, inadequate shelter, and shortages of food and clothing at Valley Forge. When he was forced to retreat across the Delaware River by General Howe he did not give up, but crossed back over the icy river to win the inspirational Battle of

Trenton. Washington was also responsible for winning the last major battle of the Revolution: the Battle of Yorktown. This was an instance when his developed skill came into play. Washington noticed that by moving to Yorktown, General Cornwallis had set himself up. The commander in chief knew that Cornwallis could be temporarily blocked at sea by Comte De Grasse, allowing himself and General Lafayette enough time to move down to Yorktown to surround him.

No other American could have accomplished what Washington did.⁴⁵ It was for this reason that President John Adams and Secretary of War James McHenry sent Washington a letter in 1798 offering him the title of lieutenant general and the chance to command the armies preparing for a conflict with the French.⁴⁶ “Washington did not hesitate. He would have preferred to sit quietly [at home]. He was aware that the stunning victories of the French revolutionists had been won by young commanders, and he was conscious of his age. However, he was in good health, and would not refuse to do what he could for his country.”⁴⁷ The last trip Washington would ever take would be to Philadelphia in November 1798 for a meeting concerning the matter.⁴⁸

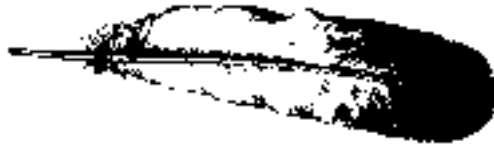
Washington was first in peace. After leaving the battlefield Washington realized that in order for the young nation to survive he must take a leadership role in its future. Washington sat as president of the Constitutional Convention. There were many arguments among the delegates at the convention. Because of his stature and his political ability Washington was able to keep the convention going until a written constitution was approved by the delegates.⁴⁹ Washington was also first in peace as President of the United States. He did not try to control the nation as a king or a dictator, but instead did what was best for the welfare of the new republic. It is hard to find any fault in Washington’s political history.⁵⁰ Washington was indeed the nation’s first great citizen.⁵¹

In his own time George Washington was first in the hearts of his countrymen.⁵² History has been kind to Washington, and he has been remembered because of his outstanding achievements. But as time progresses, “old hearts give way to new.”⁵³ Historically

Washington is considered a great man, but more recent heroes have captured the hearts of modern Americans. Undoubtedly, during the 1790's George Washington was more popular than any other American figure.

I think that Henry Lee's eulogy about Washington is fascinating because Lee describes his admiration for Washington in the first line: "First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen." Their friendship lasted through war and peace, and through it all they held each other in the highest of regards.

Lee's quote has become a famous one. His simple first words have been used by many to epitomize George Washington. While other important people, such as Thomas Jefferson, wrote eulogies about the President, Lee's words differed from theirs in that they grew out of a long personal friendship with Washington. Many of the others who spoke may have known Washington the *soldier* or Washington the *politician*. But Henry "Lighthorse Harry" Lee knew Washington the *man*.



- ¹ Elswyth Thane, Potomac Squire (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1963)
- ² *Ibid.*, 407
- ³ Washington Irving, The Life of George Washington, vol. 4 (New York: Cooperative Publication Society, Inc., 1859) p. 394
- ⁴ Thane p. 409
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 409
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 410
- ⁷ Mary Wells Ashworth and John Alexander Carroll, First in Peace 1793-1799 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957) 651, vol. 7 of George Washington, 7 vols, 1957
- ⁸ Ashworth p. 650
- ⁹ Irving 464
- ¹⁰ John R. Alden, George Washington: A Biography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1984) p. 304.
- ¹¹ Rupert Hughes, George Washington: The Human Being and The Hero 1732-1762 (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1926) pp. 50-52
- ¹² W.E. Woodward, George Washington: The Image and the Man (New York: Boni & Liveright, Inc., 1926) p. 40
- ¹³ Hughes p. 53
- ¹⁴ Robert E. Lee, preface, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States by Henry Lee (1812; New York: University Publishing Co., 1869) p. 15
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, RE. p. 16
- ¹⁶ Alden, pp. 106-107
- ¹⁷ Thane, p. 148
- ¹⁸ Hughes p. 53
- ¹⁹ Alden p. 187
- ²⁰ Douglas Southall Freeman, Washington Richard Harwell, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968) p. 424
- ²¹ Freeman p. 384
- ²² Thane p. 245
- ²³ Henry Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States (1812; New York: University Publishing Co., 1869) p. 100, 115
- ²⁴ Thane p. 245
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 250
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 262
- ²⁷ Freeman p. 550
- ²⁸ Alden, p. 234

²⁹ Ashworth p. 312

³⁰ James Thomas Flexner, George Washington: Anguish and Farewell (1793-1799) (Boston: Little, 1969) p. 50

³¹ Richard Norton Smith, George Washington and the New American Nation (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993) p. 163

³² Flexner p. 62

³³ Ibid., p. 176

³⁴ Ashworth p. 209

³⁵ Ibid., p. 579

³⁶ Ibid., p. 579

³⁷ Freeman p. 738

³⁸ Ashworth, p. 651

³⁹ Lee, R.E., p. 50

⁴⁰ Ashworth p. 651

⁴¹ Flexner p. 502

⁴² Lee, R.E., p. 50

⁴³ Holmes p. 277n

⁴⁴ Alden p. 305

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 305

⁴⁶ Holmes, p. 269

⁴⁷ Alden p. 298

⁴⁸ Holmes p. 269

⁴⁹ Alden, p. 306

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 305-306

⁵¹ Holmes p. 281

⁵² Alden p. 305

⁵³ Flexner p. 302

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Gives a good, brief overview of Washington's life.

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Freeman, Douglas Southall, Washington Abr. Ed. Richard Harwell, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968

A condensed version of one of the most complete multi-volume biographies about Washington. It does not lose the details which make the original volumes unique.

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Has much information about the travels of Washington. Goes into great detail in some places, but leaves out basic information in others.

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Has much detail in some places but leaves out some important events. A good source for learning unknown but interesting facts about Washington.

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A good source of information about interactions between Washington and his associates.

Thane, Elswyth Potomac Squire New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1963

A vivid book with drama and detail.

Woodward, W.E. George Washington: The Image and the Man New York: Boni & Liveright, Inc., 1926.

This book does not pride itself in covering everything in Washington's life, but it contains many unknown and interesting stories.

The *Politics* of Aristotle is still read as a textbook of political science in universities. It may be asked why this is so, why it has not been discarded, since all that is of value in it must surely have been absorbed and taken over by subsequent writers on the subject. Euclid was used as a textbook of geometry till well into the twentieth century, but his discoveries have been embodied in better textbooks for schools. For mathematicians the interest of Euclid is largely antiquarian; he is a part of the history of mathematics. Nor is Aristotle's biology any longer taught. Why is his *Politics* worth studying today for its own sake?

Broadly speaking the reasons are first, that the problems posed by ethical and political philosophy are not of a kind that can be solved once and for all and handed on to posterity as so much accomplished; and second, that the problems are still the same problems at bottom, however much appearances and circumstances may have altered in twenty-three centuries. How can men live together? The world has grown smaller and men are more than ever forced to live together. The problem is larger, more acute, and more complicated than it was when ancient philosophers first looked at it. How in particular can top-dog and under-dog be made to live together? Is it enough to say 'Give the top-dog arms and the under-dog enough to eat'? Or should there be only one class of dog? Then the under-dogs abolish the top-dogs, only to find themselves burdened with a new set. How perennial are the problems of government and how little they have changed are indeed all too clear. Recent events, the expansion of civilization, the spread of technological advances, and the growth of political power in all parts of the world have emphasized this. Western Europe no longer holds its former dominance either culturally or politically; but the *Politics* is not simply part of our Western heritage nor is it tied to the European political concepts which it helped to form. Just as it transcended the city-state era in which and for which it was written, so it has transcended both the imperialism and the nation-states of the nineteenth century. The nascent or half-formed states of Africa and Asia will recognize some of their own problems in Aristotle's *Politics*, just as the seeker after norms of behaviour will learn from his *Ethics*. Neither will find, nor expect to find, ready-made answers to his questions, but it is always illuminating to see another mind, sometimes penetrating, sometimes obtuse, working on problems that are fundamentally similar to one's own, however different in time, setting, and local conditions.

Thomas Alan Sinclair
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