

Robert E. Lee and Me

reviewed by LtCol Robert L. Walsh (Ret)

For the majority of his adult life, the author, BG Ty Seidule (Ret) idolized Robert E. Lee. He now condemns Lee as a traitor. Why?

Seidule grew up in Virginia and attended Washington and Lee University. He aspired to emulate his idol and become a “Virginia Gentleman.” Upon graduation, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army. During a 40-year military career, he served in a variety of assignments, participated in combat operations, obtained a doctorate degree, and taught military history at West Point. This book travels his road to disillusionment. It is important be-

>LtCol Walsh retired in 1976. In Vietnam, he served as the Executive Officer of 2/7 Mar. He resides in Vermont and taught African American History at South Burlington High School and at the University of Vermont. He has authored three books on the subject. He served in the Vermont House of Representatives (1983–1989).

is a false representation of history. It excludes slavery, white supremacy, lynchings, segregation, discrimination, and civil rights—subjects Seidule explores throughout the text. As a historian, Seidule has provided

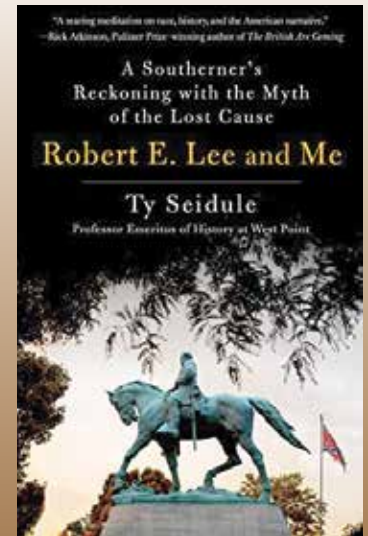
The author contends that, although the North won the war, by perpetuating the myth, the South has won the battle for the narrative and thus the history of the war.

cause it challenges many ideas and beliefs previously accepted as facts. Officers will also be challenged to reflect on the oaths we take when accepting our commissions.

The symbol of the Myth of the Lost Cause is Robert E. Lee, a noble warrior fighting for the honor of his native state of Virginia and the rights of the Confederate States. The author contends that, although the North won the war, by perpetuating the myth, the South has won the battle for the narrative and thus the history of the war. According to Seidule, it

extensive research to validate his arguments. As an individual, he speaks of his own experience growing up in the South.

Robert E. Lee is unmasked in this book. The author reveals how Lee benefitted financially from slavery. He exposes Lee’s attitudes toward slaves and freedmen before and after the hostilities. He provides examples of officers, whose backgrounds were similar to Lee, who had remained faithful to their oaths. He credits Lee as a sound tactician but contends that he lost because the U.S. strategy and



ROBERT E. LEE AND ME: A Southerner's Reckoning with the Myth of the Lost Cause. By Ty Seidule. New York: St Martin's Griffin, 2020.

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leadership were better. The author’s harshest criticism concerns Lee’s resignation from the Army. Lee was promoted to colonel on 30 March 1861.

Lincoln, believing Lee would remain with the United States, selected him to command the 1st U.S. Cavalry Regiment, a prestigious assignment. On 20 April 1861, Lee mailed in his resignation. Two days later, before his resignation had been accepted, Lee accepted a commission from Virginia as a major general.

The book concludes with the author stating that the Myth of the Lost Cause has contributed to the divisions within our society. He argues that an accurate presentation of history, in all levels of our education system, is required to heal the nation.

I found this book to be eye-opening and informative but at times somewhat repetitive.

