Aging Successfully: The Example of Robert E. Lee

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> With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on . . . to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace.[1]
>
> — Abraham Lincoln

President Lincoln made this moving commitment to veterans and their families in his second inaugural address in 1865. While the public and government commitment to veterans remains strong, much has changed since Lincoln's day. Contemporary developments in American demography, research on aging, and changes in the military provide both promise and challenge for the men and women who "have borne the battle" in our time.[2]

The American population is experiencing a demographic revolution that has important implications for the military. Gains in life expectancy, declining fertility rates, increased female labor-force participation, and more diverse, multigenerational family structures affect veterans and other segments of America's aging population.[3] Today's veterans on average will live considerably longer than their Civil War counterparts. At a mean retirement age of 42.8 for military careerists, most can expect to live over three decades with few significant health limitations,[4] and with many opportunities for productive activities. For others, the extra years will seem a bane, not a blessing. The challenge of successful aging is especially great for the oldest, those 85 and above, who are likely to encounter severe physical limitations as they struggle with multiple roles as parent, grandparent, and great-grandparent. The number of US veterans 85 years and over is expected to increase nearly 600 percent from 1993 to 2010.[5]

As the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) grapples with its "geriatric imperative," precipitated by the aging of its constituency, many veterans may not be prepared to make their extended years a period of great accomplishment and productivity.[6]

Significant progress has been made in the field of aging that is of direct relevance to individual veterans and military policy makers who are concerned about aging veterans. A seminal review article on human aging argued that the negative effects of the aging process itself have been exaggerated; it suggests that changes in lifestyle, diet, exercise, personal habits, and psychosocial factors can modify the vicissitudes of age.[7] Yet, like other older Americans, many aging veterans seem to lack clear-cut age norms and role models for late life behavior. Status uncertainty at the individual level and a shortage of institutions and ceremonies that help prepare people for role changes with advancing age have contributed to an uninformed state among veterans regarding "successful" aging, despite productive aging initiatives by the VA and other leading professional and governmental organizations.[8]

The need to provide veterans with better models for successful aging has increased with dramatic reductions in the number of military personnel on active duty. Since 1987, the American military has reduced its overall force by one fourth. If current plans hold, it will have declined one third by 1999.[9] Though much has been accomplished to ease the transition of officers and enlisted personnel to civilian life, veterans say that they are discouraged because their release from military service into an uncertain economy came sooner than expected. Many face financial and vocational uncertainty; some worry about their ability to fulfill multiple, ongoing responsibilities with aging children, parents, and grandparents. Cohort differences among veterans (World War II, Korean War, Vietnam, Desert Storm) have complicated the development of policies and programs.[10] Years of service have brought honor to some retirees but left others physically and emotionally wounded. An era of austerity, a

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The authors remain dedicated to interdisciplinary collaboration in keeping with recommendations of the National Institute of Health and other national research organizations.

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military establishment wrestling with other competing priorities, and limited coordination between the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs combine to make individual preparation the most important step in aging successfully.

Biological, sociological, and generational factors often are used to explain changes in behavior related to advancing age. Recently some military researchers have argued that more attention should be given to the effects of historical events (war, downsizing of the military) on lives. Increasing evidence suggests that while such events often cause profound trauma and social dislocation, they also offer opportunities for personal growth.[11]

Research in the field of aging also suggests that the effects of life events depend most on how the event is interpreted and given meaning by the individual, rather than the severity or stressfulness of the event.[12] How military personnel interpret the events of their career—the effects of a military career on family, type of retirement, transition to civilian life—may determine perceptions of success or failure of their individual journeys. Though the military establishment may encourage this process through a variety of transition programs, success ultimately requires a commitment by the individual.

Some personality theorists (Allport, Erikson, Jung) have maintained that wisdom is the application of a lifelong understanding of one's self. Retired individuals have a tremendous opportunity for this form of wisdom because they have a great deal of information about their individual selves to process:

> The elder has a reservoir of strength in the wellsprings of history and storytelling. As collectors of time and preservers of memory, those healthy elders who have survived into a reasonably fit old age have time on their side—time that is to be dispensed wisely and creatively, usually in the form of stories, to those younger ones who will one day follow in their footsteps. Telling these stories, and telling them well, marks a certain capacity for one generation to entrust itself to the next, by passing on a certain shared and collective identity to the survivors of the next generation: the future.[13]

A successful life review can be both the source and the consequence of such sharing of information.

General Robert E. Lee's late life serves as a possible frame of reference for contemporary veterans and their future selves. As one historian put it, "The reasons for his success remain valid for any soldier who must bear a like burden of responsibility."[14] Obviously none of us is comparable to Robert E. Lee in stature or experience. Reflection on Lee's vocational, social-familial, emotional, physical, and religious themes may, however, assist contemporary veterans in negotiating their own responses to the events of their lives and in planning successful futures.

Though each individual's life history is unique, biographical accounts have a potential power to move us deeply in exploring legitimate questions about ourselves, particularly at a time of transition.[15] As one aging

veteran put it, "I wish I had known I was going to live as long as I have. I would have lived smarter." Lee's story can help today's aging veterans to make their last years a time of reflection, promise, and opportunity. This article therefore examines Lee's last five years, from 1865 to 1870, to identify and describe his successful, paradigmatic adaptations to aging.

Lee's Retirement and Late Life Success

In the spring of 1865, General Robert E. Lee passed through the Confederate and Union lines en route to the McClean house at Appomattox, Virginia, to surrender what remained of his starving Confederate Army to General Ulysses S. Grant. "Thirty-nine years of devotion to military duty had come to this . . . and this, too, was duty."[16]

Lee, like most returning Southern soldiers—and our more recent Vietnam veterans—made the journey home without the solace of victory, virtually alone, without fanfare, to confront a depressed community and a divided country. He was a homeless, paroled prisoner of war who faced a potential trial and hanging. He was unemployed; without government retirement, pension, or medical benefits; and with inadequate finances. He was exhausted from the years of war, trauma, and stress, and he suffered from a number of degenerative conditions evidently including significant coronary disease (atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease). He was confronted with multiple family responsibilities, including a frail wife, five unemployed adult children, and another son missing in action. And he bore other losses too deep for us to fathom. A Baptist minister described Lee's entry into Richmond "amidst a gloomy spring downpour":

> His steed was bespattered with mud, and his head hung down as if worn by long travelling. The horseman himself sat his horse like a master; his face was ridged with self-respecting grief. . . . Even in the fleeting moment of his passing by my gate, I was awed by his incomparable dignity.[17]

Lee was a thoroughbred even in utter defeat. While many of his contemporaries left the country or would remain incapacitated because of their reduced circumstances, Lee's transition to civilian life was characterized distinctively by multifaceted, successful aging themes.[18] Over a century later, the General's last years would be portrayed by Charles Flood as Lee's "great, forgotten chapter."[19]

As the senior retired military officer of the defeated South, Lee would, according to one historian, do "more than any other American to heal the wounds of war."[20] Vocationally, Lee invigorated a college that stressed classical subjects and practical education. Domestically, he became a prototype of intergenerational caregiving, familial responsibility, and social support. Emotionally, he survived both the traumas of war and his cumulative losses, all the while maintaining a personal sense of control and autonomy.

Financially, he set his own house back in order, serving as an example of frugality to the defeated South. Physically, he maintained an exercise regime that helped to maximize his independence and functionality. Spiritually, Lee allowed the unobtrusive, small voice of conscience, rooted in unceasing faith, to have an uncommon influence in all spheres of his life and decisionmaking.

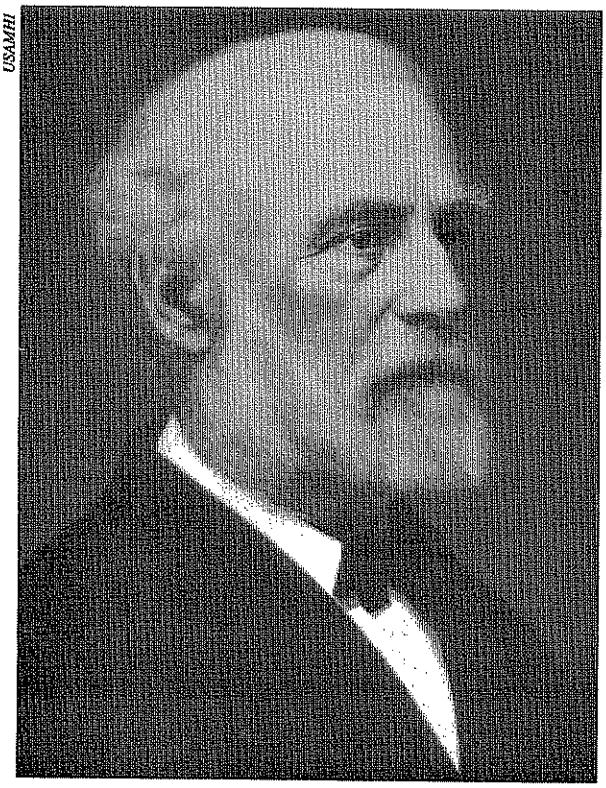
Vocational Themes

After a few months of unemployment, Lee accepted the presidency of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University), then a small, essentially bankrupt institution. Starting with only four professors on staff when he assumed his duties, Lee would be recognized by the end of the decade as one of America's top educators, "without reference to his military past."[21]

Under Lee's guidance, Washington College offered one of the first elective college systems in the country, encouraging its students to learn how to "design bridges, develop chemical compounds for fertilizers, restore railroads and canals, and work on blueprints for factories."[22] In 1859, all but one of its 95 students had been from Virginia. By 1867, two years after Lee accepted the presidency, Washington College had 410 students from 26 states.[23] Under his leadership, the college became financially solvent. During his tenure ten departments were added, stressing science and modern languages. Schools of commerce, agriculture, journalism (the first in America), and law were planned or opened. Before such institutions as Harvard or Johns Hopkins emphasized research in higher education, Lee's faculty initiated summer studies, resident masterships (forerunner of fellowships), and research for the public welfare at Washington College.[24]

Lee's success as an academician can be attributed in part to his capacity to change roles late in life. Having taken a new vocational identity, he refused to wear a uniform for what would be his last portrait, stating "I am a soldier no more."[25] Another reason for his vocational success can be found in Lee's advocacy of lifelong learning. "The education of a man or woman," he declared, "is never completed till they die."[26] Having seen many young men fall in battle under his standard, and sensing God's providence in the offer of the presidency of Washington College, Lee was committed to training young men to rebuild the South and reunite the country.[27] This spiritual affirmation of his call to a different profession may have enabled Lee to resist a variety of tempting offers (including a candidacy for governor of Virginia, the vice chancellorship of the University of the South, and titular head of an insurance company) and focus all his energies on his new vocation.[28]

Thus Lee appeared to embrace a new vocational calling without undue dependence upon his military identity. He was generally able to discriminate successfully in electing to apply some military-based skills while discarding others. Open to new learning himself, Lee was able to take considerable risk in making late life vocational changes.[29]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Lee as president of Washington College: "I am a soldier no more."

Lee's late life encourages us to ask questions about our attitude toward lifelong learning and our willingness to assume new roles, to take risks, and to know ourselves well enough to be able to maximize our talents and experiences.

Social-Familial Health

Retirement from the military enabled Lee to be closer to his family; reciprocity of generational support became the order of the day. Remembering his earlier days of separation from the hearth, the presence of his family at Washington College added greatly to the quality of his life. He must have felt valued as he received a steady flow of affection, information, advice, and assistance. His family's presence reduced the effect of stress and helped protect him from the consequences of illness.[30]

Lee also was a source of support for his family and friends in late life. For instance, he was deeply sensitive to his wife's progressive frailness from arthritis and other maladies.[31] After the war he removed her from the stressful circumstances of postwar Richmond and planned numerous vacations to locations of potential therapeutic benefit to her.[32] When a new president's home was designed at Washington College, he masterminded the

building of an extensive veranda fully accessible by his wife in her wheelchair, "silent evidence, after sixty years, of his thought for Mrs. Lee's comfort in her invalidism."[33]

Lee's caregiving was not limited to his wife; sickness was a recurrent theme in the life of the Lees. Douglas Southall Freeman describes Lee in the caregiving role during one of these episodes that occurred on vacation:

> Mildred (Lee's youngest daughter) contracted a low debilitating fever which the doctor diagnosed as typhoid. Her mother could not nurse her, and the burden fell primarily on the General. In her sickness, Mildred developed whimsies, and insisted that she could not sleep unless her father sat by her and held her hand. He did not try to argue her out of this or to substitute someone else for the vigils. Night after night he stayed there, in the little upstairs chamber of the cottage. . . . What was he thinking about through those long hours, he who had commanded tens of thousands of men in the bloodiest battles of the continent, and yet had spent so many of his days as nurse to mother, to invalid wife, and to children?[34]

Wrote a frequent visitor to the Lee home, "His tenderness to his children, especially his daughters, was mingled with a delicate courtesy which belonged to an older day than ours."[35]

Lee did not allow himself to become socially isolated following his military career. In fact, he experienced considerable growth in his social network. Despite his caregiving responsibilities, the presence of close family members and friends increased the quality of Lee's late life.[36] Though Lee's family life was not without problems, his manner of interacting with family members set an example of kindness and mutual respect that fostered a growing level of familial intimacy.[37] During his last days, his family and friends would mount a round-the-clock vigil of support for the man who had been their caregiver and supporter in time past.[38]

Lee's late life with his family suggests the wonderful possibility of more stable family relations for the military careerist, and of a death with dignity, at home among familiar surroundings, with family present. Lee's family was part of his own self-description. His experience encourages us to examine the events of our careers and how those events have affected us and our families so that we might act with understanding in bringing about improved family relations and enhanced stability. Lee's story also suggests that we need to acknowledge our own mortality and to develop specific, proactive plans based on its reality: a will, living wills or durable power of attorney with a health care proxy.

Emotional-Mental Health Themes

One of the greatest challenges of successful aging is the capacity to refrain from visiting the problems and trauma of one generation onto the next. Lee demonstrated an ability not only to survive the dual traumas of war and

the lingering effects of a difficult childhood, but, in late life, to compensate for and in part recover from these experiences.

There is evidence that Lee's early years were characterized by neglect, by a father whose life was besmirched by extravagance and marital infidelity, and by his mother's frailty and melancholy.[39] As a result, Lee's capacity to experience a full expression of his childhood during his early years may have been severely limited.[40] During his early military career, he would struggle with issues of separation from his family and self-doubt as a parent.[41] Despite these early and mid-life experiences, Lee's last years were characterized consistently by intimate father-son, father-daughter experiences, and he seemed to rediscover aspects of his lost childhood in his childlike, sought-after relations with children of all types and ages.[42]

Lee's war experiences were extremely traumatic. During the last days of the Civil War, suicidal thoughts would tempt him to "ride along the line and all will be over!" but he was rescued by his religious commitment and sense of duty.[43] He saw countless injuries and deaths. Not only was his life repeatedly threatened during the war, but so were the lives of all of his sons who were actively engaged in the conflict, as well as the security of his wife and daughters.[44] After the war he would seek to avoid feelings, activities, and interest in war-related matters, a characteristic found in many suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. "I do not wish," he would write, "to awaken memories of the past."[45]

The psychotherapeutic value of reminiscence for older people was not recognized in Lee's lifetime.[46] Nevertheless, Lee experienced some therapeutic benefits from confronting his past. Lee's son Rooney, whose first wife died while he was a prisoner of war, became engaged to marry following the war. The wedding was to be held in Petersburg; Lee was reluctant to attend, dreading "to visit again the scenes of his travail of soul during the last winter of the war."[47] Rooney ultimately convinced his father to attend the wedding, and Lee described the positive effect it had on his life emotionally:

> My visit to Petersburg was extremely pleasant. . . . I was gratified in seeing many friends. In addition, when our armies were in front of Petersburg, I suffered so much in body and mind on account of the good townspeople, especially on that gloomy night when I was forced to abandon them, that I have always referred to them in sadness and sorrow. My old feelings returned to me, as I passed well-remembered spots and recalled the ravages of the hostile shells. But when I saw the cheerfulness with which the people were working to restore their condition, and witnessed the comforts with which they were surrounded, loads of sorrow which had been pressing upon me for years were lifted from my heart. [48]

By exposing himself to new information and by facing his pain with others, Lee was able to reevaluate aspects of his past, to let go of some of the discomforting feelings associated with it, and to recognize that he was not

alone in his struggle. Perhaps there is no greater mark of success than Lee's commitment during his last years to avoid a revisitation of his trauma as a child and as a soldier on the next generation.

Physical Health Themes

Lee's lifestyle suggests that he recognized the importance of self-care and good health behavior. During his last five years, he continued an exercise pattern that had its roots in military service. "When I was with the army," he told his nephew:

> I had to take daily rides in order to obtain the exercise that was necessary for me. When I got on my horse, no matter what battle or movement was impending, and no matter what my cares or troubles were, I put all such things out of my mind and thought only of my ride, of the scenery around me, or of other pleasant things, and so returned to my work refreshed and relieved and in better and stronger condition. If it had not been for the power to do this, I do not see how I could have stood what I had to go through. [49]

Despite his zeal for activity, General Lee suffered during the final years of his life from several chronic illnesses, which eventually caused his death in 1870.

Based upon the descriptions of his biographers, it seems highly likely that Lee had coronary artery disease. Despite limitations in diagnostic procedures and therapies, he sought regular medical assistance and was compliant with his physicians' recommendations. Perhaps most important, Lee made every effort to maintain regular physical activity, even when it was likely that the discomfort he was experiencing would have made a sedentary lifestyle tempting. He continued his regular horseback rides but reduced their length and intensity. His actions are consistent with current recommendations that even patients with severe cardiovascular disease attempt to maintain regular physical activity.[50]

Despite his efforts, Lee's health became progressively compromised during his last months by work-related stressors, his inability to continue regular exercise, and the emotional effects of the war. "Old age and sorrow," he said, "are wearing me away."[51] Still, he remained active in his position as President of Washington College until his death at the age of 63, hardly a ripe old age, but one greater than that reached by most men of his birth cohort.[52]

Lee was able to continue after his military retirement his practices of regular exercise and physical exams. Deciding what practices acquired during military service should be continued represents a vital area of inquiry yet today. As a veteran of World War II recently put it, "When that first bullet came over my head, and they provided me with free cigareetes, I lit up. After the war, I stopped smoking." Developing increased levels of physical activity and making dietary changes are among the many successful aging practices available to today's veterans.

Financial Health

Though Lee knew from experience that economic security was a basic underpinning for emotional health, the pursuit of money was never an overriding pursuit. For him, simplicity was more than a necessity; it was a virtue. Mindful of his father's indebtedness, eviction from their Stratford Hall home when he was three, and the effects of penurious economies on his mother, Lee stressed after the war:

> Work is what we now require. . . . We must spend less. . . . We require very little, and we must use that little sparingly. . . . By this course the good old times . . . will return again. We may not see them, but our children will, and we will live over again in them.[53]

"I have seen him," an assistant at Washington College once wrote, "in garments which many men of smaller income and far less reputation would have been unwilling to wear."[54]

Lee worked earnestly to put his house in order financially so as not to repeat the sins of his father. His initial salary at Washington College was $1500 a year; business offers of six times that amount awakened no pecuniary yearnings.[55] When he received an increase in his salary from the college, he did not change his style of living. His thrift was successful, and he invested wisely in good securities. All of his children would receive inheritances.[56]

When the college offered Mrs. Lee the use of the president's house for life and an annual annuity, Lee declined: "I am unwilling that my family should become a tax to the college." "Nothing is more impressive in the intimate annals of the family," Freeman wrote, "than the absence of complaints about hard living or lack of money."[57]

Though Lee recognized the necessity of economic security and worked hard and lived frugally, his financial motivations were in no sense greedy; his treasures were found in other pursuits. His late life suggests that we examine our financial motivations, and that we act to the best of our ability with our convictions.

Themes of Religious Involvement

In an effort to uncover the real Lee, the paradoxes of his nature and the validity of his historical image recently have come under study and criticism. No scholar, however, challenges the genuineness of his religious involvement and the centrality of its influence on all aspects of his life.[58] Lee's religious practices included attitudinal, organizational, and nonorganizational forms of expression: daily morning prayers with his family; daily private devotionals, prayer, and Bible study; regular chapel attendance during the week and on Sunday; leadership in the local church; and financial support of worthy missions.[59] His religious involvement greatly influenced his interpretation of life events. "We must be resigned to necessity, and commit

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ourselves in adversity," he would write after the war, "to the will of a merciful God as cheerfully as in prosperity. All is done for our good and our faith must continue unshaken."[60]

Whereas many of his contemporaries and their family members were bitter over the harsh realities of Reconstruction, Lee argued for reconciliation by personal example, by countless personal counsels, and through bountiful correspondence.[61] His faith allowed him to leave the outcome and results of the war with God.[62] In a private discussion with a visiting clergyman, who had exclaimed vehemently in an earlier social gathering over the impropriety of the General's indictment for treason, Lee responded:

> Doctor, there is a good old book which I read and you preach from, which says, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." Do you think your remarks this evening were quite in the spirit of that teaching? I have never cherished toward them bitter or vindictive feelings, and have never seen the day when I did not pray for them.[63]

The nonorganizational, private expressions of Lee's faith were the most important to him.[64] The inner workings of his faith met deep needs in the aging life of a man who felt as if he had failed to meet impossible standards of moral, vocational, and domestic perfection. He found relief in the foundational Christian concepts of grace and forgiveness, which in turn fostered his genuine humility in success and his capacity to make "youth and age akin."[65]

"Lee reacted to his inner problems," Thomas Connelly wrote, "with a steady immersion in religion . . . . Lee held a simple faith in God which guided his conduct. His deeper humanity was reflected in such traits as his kindness to Federal prisoners, a willingness to share privation with his soldiers, and a concern for the army's religious welfare."[66] Lee's faith, according to Freeman, "was stronger after Appomattox."[67] His "instinctive" kindness, consistent humility, "unquestioning response to duty," self-denial, devotion to family, willingness to accept the consequences of his actions, and clean-mindedness were all a reflection of Lee's spiritual nature.[68]

Like many of our veterans, Lee was affected profoundly by events beyond his personal control. After doing his duty, his style was to subject

things seemingly beyond his control to his understanding of God's providence. So equipped to cope with circumstances beyond his influence, he moved with confidence into an environment that he believed would be responsive to his initiatives, one in which he believed he could achieve desired outcomes. These antecedent processes of faith and the confident pursuit of achievable goals enabled Lee to maintain a sense of control throughout most of his late life. This aspect of his personality provided him with a source of stability during times of difficulty. Lee's final chapter of life demonstrates that individual choices can provide opportunities that can help one transcend difficult circumstances, when guided by a core set of unwavering beliefs.

Conclusions

Following the Civil War, there was little societal support in place to assist Confederate veterans. Yet Robert E. Lee aged successfully after the war. He maintained a robust health, sense of control, and functional capacity for most of his final years; he used effective psychosocial practices that enhanced his family life; he avoided premature functional incapacity within the limits of his physical condition and given the quality of the medical care available; and he reduced the risk of adverse health outcomes. To a large degree, General Lee was successful because he constructively framed and interpreted the events and circumstances of his life.

This article is not intended to provide aging veterans with overly simplistic prescriptions for "finishing well," nor to impose unrealistic goals, nor to suggest that one must live exactly as Lee did. He lived in a different time. His late life story represents an intergenerational transfer of a different form, and it has been told here to help aging veterans ask important questions.

"It is history," Lee said, "that teaches us to hope." Perhaps contemporary veterans who are experiencing a radical shift in mid-career and are facing the prospect of added years can find hope in Lee's historical example. His vitality across the adult life span culminated during his last years when he contributed so much to his family, community, and country.[69]

Many of Lee's contemporaries, poisoned by the effects of war, lacked a sense of control and purpose in their lives. While their choices were certainly limited, Lee found purpose for living his life responsibly from his religious involvement. Though his lack of adequate financial assets was a factor in Lee's pursuit of another career, his confident belief in his ability to achieve desired outcomes influenced not only his decision to assume an academic career late in life, but also affected his willingness to exercise for most of his last years. His adherence to a regular exercise regimen in the face of degenerative illness sustained a level of functionality that allowed him to continue to contribute to his society.

Another encompassing theme in Lee's late life was his capacity to cope with life events associated with loss. In Lee's theology, each loss paved the way for further personal development. His losses were multiple and diverse: they included losses through death, separations and departures from loved ones, relocations, lost dreams, unrealized expectations, and, ultimately, the loss of his idealized younger self. Lee and his family emerged from one crisis only to encounter another, with but occasional periods of tranquility. Despite the trauma of war and other losses, however, Lee showed a clear ability to play, work, and love, and to make the decisions needed to shape his late life.

Lee might teach us that a hoped-for period of tranquility associated with retirement may never arrive. We must learn to seek a balance of stability on one hand and change and transformation on the other. Retirement should be anticipated as an active growth phase within one's life span.

Those who have served their country honorably in military service are an incredibly diverse group. The needs of World War II veterans may be substantially different from those of the contemporary veteran, who may be retiring from a 20-year military career without any direct experience with war. Despite these profound cohort differences, all veterans share the experience of serving their country, and ultimately each veteran must interpret his own military experience. Many veterans share common traits of discipline, self-sacrifice, and willingness to take on tough missions often associated with military experience. This may help many to age productively and to contribute to our country's successful transition into the 21st century. However, many of our veterans have been so committed to the accomplishment of their military missions that they have not taken the time to properly examine their own lives in preparation for the future.

After retirement, Lee engaged in an ongoing life review which led to many successful aging practices. Throughout the numerous tragedies of his personal and professional life, some brought on by historical events beyond his control, he showed a willingness and capacity to address constructively many of the difficult questions of life. Just as Lee was compelled to examine and interpret the historical and familial events of his life, so each area of our lives holds significance that requires individual interpretation. Like Lee, today's veterans can be pioneers in the development of new roles as they travel uncharted territory. Many of the familiar social structures associated with work, retirement, and education may be transformed in the coming decades as age loses some of its power to determine when people should enter or leave these structures.

Just as the people of Lee's and Lincoln's generation, we have the opportunity and obligation to treat with dignity the nearly 27 million men and women who currently represent the heterogeneous cohorts of Americans who have served in the military forces during this century.[70] It is important that we

honor all veterans: those who gave their lives and those who continue to live with the experience of war, including the many disabled veterans who served their country so honorably. At the same time, surviving veterans need to help themselves by asking the difficult questions of life. Sound policies, programs, and research must be met by individual preparation and responsibility. In the final analysis, the quality of each veteran's life will be affected by the investment he or she makes in examining and assessing the life themes that were so successfully addressed by Robert E. Lee.

NOTES:

1. Abraham Lincoln, 4 March 1865, in Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln, The War Years* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), IV, 93.

2. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Annual Report of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs* (Washington: Department of Veterans Affairs, 008B3-93-1, 1992), p. 1.

3. M. Neal et al., *Balancing Work and Caregiving for Children, Adults, and Elders* (London: Sage Publications, 1993); V. Bengtson, C. Rosenthal, and L. Burton, "Families and Aging: Diversity and Heterogeneity," in *Aging and the Social Sciences*, ed. R. H. Binstock and L. K. George (New York: Academic Press, 1990), pp. 263-64.

4. Average excludes Reserve and disability retirees. Office of the Actuary, Department of Defense, *1992 DOD Statistical Report on the Military Retirement System* (Arlington, Va.: Department of Defense, Office of the Actuary, 1993), p. 97.

5. The number of US veterans 85 years and over in 1993 (more than 200,000) is expected to increase nearly 600 percent by 2010 to about 1.3 million. The percent of the 85-and-over veterans who are World War II veterans increases to 98.2 percent in 2008 (1.1 million). National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, Demographics Division, *Veteran Population Projections 1990 to 2010* (Washington: Department of Veterans Affairs, 1993).

6. W. A. Achenbaum, "The Politics of Aging: The Geriatric Imperative of the Department of Veterans Affairs," *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 3 (No. 3, 1991), 33-50.

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8. See for example, T. T. Ysohikawa, "United States Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care for Aging Veterans," *Facts and Research in Gerontology* (1992), pp. 431-37; US Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, *Healthy People 2000* (Washington: GPO, 1991, DHHS Publication No. PHS 91-50212); American Psychological Association, *Vitality for Life: Psychological Research for Productive Aging, Research Initiatives* (Washington: APA, July 1993).

9. "Changes in Force Bring on Career Jitters," *Army Times*, 3 January 1994, p. 26.

10. Ibid.

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