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CINCINNATI, OHIO

ROBERT E. LEE'S UNDERSTUDY

Some Unpublished Chapters of Confederate History. An
Interview With General Robert F. Hoke, the Most Retiring
and Most Formidable of all Carolina Soldiers

BY COL. FRED A. OLDS

Little of the personal history of the Confederacy is or ever will be known. Tragic and heroic episodes of the Great War are passing from the memory of mankind, with the death of the principal actors. It was to preserve the following that Col. Olds sought out the old veteran just before his death, and unearthed the fact totally unrecorded that General Hoke was next in line for command of the Army of Northern Virginia.



WHEN the ordinance of secession was signed, May, 1861, North Carolina was ready for business and went into the Civil War hammer and tongs, never to give up until some time after Appamottox, when Joseph E. Johnston surrendered, near Durham, N. C. Troops poured into Raleigh. The First Regiment of Volunteers was organized under Col. D. H. Hill, who had served with gallantry in the war with Mexico, and marched into Virginia. One of his lieutenants in the command was Robert F. Hoke, from the County of Lincoln. Only a few months before he had been a clerk in the United States Census Bureau, his desk-mate being Nelson A. Miles. It happened that these two officers were the youngest major generals on their respective sides in the great contest.

FIRST REVIEW BY ROBERT E. LEE

Col. Hill, who was the father of President D. H. Hill of the North Carolina Agricultural & Mechanical College at Raleigh, was a fine disciplinarian and had his regiment in the very pink of condition. One day a review was ordered at Yorktown and the North Carolina troops were inspected by General Robert E. Lee, then in command of the military forces of Virginia.

Lieutenant Hoke then for the first time saw Lee and told the writer that in all his life he had never seen so handsome a man and such a picture of a soldier, adding that he little thought that day the time would come when Lee would rise to such greatness and that he would be thrown in such close relations with him. At the same time he was so much impressed by Lee's personality that he said he was a man not to be forgotten; one who seemed capable of everything.

Robert F. Hoke was one of the last major generals of the Confederacy to survive. He was remarkably like General Lee in personal appearance, his resemblance to him being so great that many a time the writer has seen Confederate veterans on entering the Hall of History at Raleigh look at the portrait of General Hoke, salute and say, "That's Marse Robert."

THE BATTLE AT NEWMARKET ROAD

General Hoke went on to say to the writer: "Little did I think then that high rank would come to me and that in

the years to come I should have the honor and privilege of riding with General Lee for nearly three months, in the Autumn of 1864, when it was my good fortune to be in the saddle with him several hours each day. We were on the north side of the James River, guarding Richmond against attack by General B. F. Butler. We had only two divisions; that of General Fields' and my own. My division had been fighting hard all the year, and though reduced in numbers was a perfect fighting machine, ready for anything and afraid of nothing. I want to tell you one fact. General Lee did not think his soldiers could be whipped. He never did think so; his confidence in their success was simply limitless. Butler had 20,000 troops there and we were guarding the Newmarket road. This was the only time I ever saw General Lee nervous. We had built a line of breast works ten feet high and four miles long, in front of General Butler, in order to make him believe our force was a large one. It was our custom to move our men back and forth behind our entrenchments, which had been thrown up on the side facing them so there was no ditch on our side, and frequently we double-quickened our troops back and forth and so deceived General Butler into thinking we had a big force. One night I rode out in front of our fort, to listen for any noises, the night being very still and frosty; such a night carries sound a great distance, and a person could be heard talking an incredible space away. I heard the movement of artillery and the hollow tread of feet, which showed that General Butler was on the move, and I at once concluded he was going to attack that part of our works immediately across the Newmarket road. I at once massed my division there with plenty of artillery, with shell and canister for close work. Very early in the morning General Lee rode over to where I was and in a tone which betrayed an anxiety and nervousness I had never before seen him exhibit asked me what I thought the enemy intended to do. He simply did not know where General Butler intended to strike us, but I told him that his purpose was to capture the Newmarket road and so split our force. It seemed but a moment before Butler made the attack, and in an instant General Lee was himself again, all uncertainty gone, and full of the fire of battle. We whipped Butler to a stand-still, though he came at us again and again hanging on for several hours like a bulldog; but at last he gave