



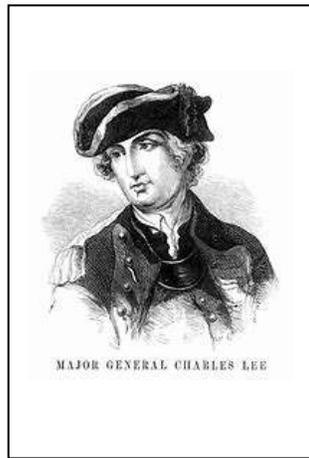
Major General Charles Lee

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February 6, 1732 – October 2, 1782

Charles Lee was born on February 6, 1732 in Darnhall, Cheshire, England. He was the son of Major General John Lee and Isabella Bunbury (daughter of Sir Henry Bunbury, 3rd Baronet). He came from a landed gentry with national stature. Of the seven Lee children only Charles and a sister Sidney survived to adulthood. Sidney never married.

Lee suffered poor health most of his life. Because of this he received private instruction. He was then sent to a private academy in Switzerland and then sent to King Edward VI School near the home of his uncle Reverend William Bunbury. Lee became proficient in several different languages including Latin, Greek and French. After his formal education his father who was in command of the 55th (later renamed the 44th) Foot Regiment purchased him a commission as an Ensign on April 9, 1747 in the same regiment. He reported for



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duty with his regiment in Ireland. He soon received a lieutenant's commission and was sent with his regiment to North America in 1754 to fight in the French Indian War under Major General Edward Braddock. He was with Braddock at his defeat at the battle of Monongahela in 1755. While he was in America, he married the daughter of a Mohawk Chief who gave birth to twins. He was known to the Mohawk as Ounewaterika, or Boiling Water due to his short fuse and temper. On June 11, 1756 Lee purchased a Captain's commission in the 44th for 900 pounds. He was wounded in a failed assault on Fort Ticonderoga. After recovering, Lee took part in the capture of Fort Niagara in 1759 and Montreal in 1760 thus ending the war in America with the conquest of Canada. He returned to England and was transferred to the 103rd as a major. He resigned from the British Army and served as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Portuguese Army and fought against the Spanish and helped repel the Spanish invasion of Portugal. In 1765 Lee served as an aide-de-camp for King Stanislaus

II of Poland as a Major General. He saw action in the Russo Turkish war in 1769.

Upon his return to England, he found himself sympathetic to the American Colonist. He moved to the Colonies in 1773 and in 1775 purchased an estate near the home of his friend Horatio Gates with whom he had served with during the French Indian War.

Lee had ambitions to become the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. Although Lee was generally acknowledged at the Second Continental Congress as being the most capable candidate, the Congress chose George Washington instead. Lee was made a Major General, 3rd in command and would move to being 2nd in command with the resignation of Artemas Ward due to ill health in 1776. Lee was very critical and often appeared insubordinate to Washington. He wrote a letter to Joseph Reed which Washington read lamenting Washington's indecision in the Battle of Fort Mifflin which the British captured along with a garrison of 3,000 men on November 16, 1776. Lee was captured by British Troops at Red Bank in Pennsylvania while writing a letter to General Horatio Gates complaining about Washington's deficiencies as Commander in Chief on December 12, 1776. Upon his

release in a prisoner exchange in early April 1778 Lee was greeted enthusiastically by Washington at Valley Forge.

Despite this while in York, Lee lobbied Congress to promote him to Lieutenant General and went above Washington's head to submit a plan to reorganize the Army in a way that was markedly different than what Washington and worked long to implement.

Lees downfall followed his conduct at the Battle of Monmouth. Lee failed to effectively communicate with his subordinates and failed to follow orders Washington had given him resulting in a confused and unorganized withdrawal of Lee's forces. After the battle Washington send Von Steuben to relieve him from his command. In a letter to Washington afterwards protesting the relief of his command Lee was very insolent and accused Washington of guilty of "an act of cruel injustice

toward him." Washington wrote that the letter was highly inappropriate and opened an official inquiry into Lees actions during the battle resulting in a Courts Martial, at Lees own request, on July 4, 1778. Lee was convicted on all three charges, disobeying orders, conducting an unnecessary and shameful retreat and disrespect towards the Commander in Chief. Congress confirmed the verdict on December 5, 1778. Lee was suspended from the army for one year. Congress, however terminated his service in 1780 following the receipt of a very ill received letter he had written to Congress.

Lee retired to his Prato Rio property in the Shenandoah Valley where he raised horses and dogs. However, debts had accumulated and he was forced to sell the property. On a trip to Philadelphia to complete the sale Lee fell sick ad died on October 2, 1782. In his will he left everything to his sister who died in 1778

without ever marrying. The history or his Indian wife and twin children is unknown.

Lees home, Prato Rio still exist and is on the National Register of Historic Places. Fort Lee, New Jersey was named for him during his lifetime. Also, Lee, Massachusetts, Lee, New Hampshire and Leetown, West Virginia are also named for him.

This broadsheet is dedicated to the 250th Anniversary Celebration of the Declaration of Independence for more information visit the National Society Sons of the American Revolution website at: www.sar.org

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Sources:

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