

From the Desk of
Stephen M. Hood

March 2, 2021

Dear General Seidule,

Based upon your new book *Robert E. Lee and Me: A Southerner's Reckoning with the Myth of the Lost Cause* (2021), and your commentary found online on the subject, I feel it is my duty as a patriotic American to use my right of free speech to challenge your thesis.

I am the author of three nonfiction books on Civil War history, one of which won two Book of the Year awards. This is not for bragging rights, but by way of introduction. My most recent work is *Patriots Twice: Former Patriots and the Building of America after the Civil War* (Savas Beatie, 2020).

I am a direct descendant of three Union soldiers and gg-nephew of a Confederate cavalryman. As my name implies, I am also kin to Gen. John Bell Hood, but only a distant relative.

I am utterly distressed at the destruction of American history; Confederate monuments and landmarks being the low-hanging fruit for radicals who have already moved on to European explorer/discoverers and our Founding Fathers. Credentialed people like you who actively work for historical cleansing are particularly disturbing, for your efforts rub salt in ancient wounds and create social and cultural upheaval.

Your argument that Confederates were traitors is preposterous, and easily disproven by the fact that those who exchanged shot, shell, and bayonet with Confederates for four years did not consider them so.

Ten U.S. presidents from Grant to Wilson appointed former Confederates: one chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, three associate justices, two U.S. Attorneys General, two Secretaries of the U.S. Navy, eight U.S. Army Generals, more than 50 U.S. ambassadors and consuls, and a U.S. Senate majority leader. The list of former Confederates in the United States government and American society is extensive, impressive, and persuasive of their patriotism. It also runs completely counter to your thesis.

As for John Bell Hood, specifically, he was and remains a model soldier and citizen to all military men and women, past, present, and future. In addition to suffering a combat wound in Texas in 1857 as a member of the elite U.S. Second Cavalry Regiment, Hood also lost an arm and a leg in combat at Gettysburg and Chickamauga, yet returned to active field service until the war's end.

After the war Hood comported himself as a model citizen, and urged patriotism, reconciliation, and integration. In a speech to Confederate veterans in 1874, Hood said, “We must, my comrades, turn from the past, and meet with courage the mighty issues of the present and future.” Hood added prophetically, “*With a majority of Americans favoring peace and good will to all, there will be a strong minority constantly probing the wound and arousing old enmities. Let us nevertheless, welcome reconciliation upon a fair basis, for the sake of humanity and all that is dear to us, but remain steadfast to principle. Obey the law, and make as good citizens as we proved soldiers.*”

Hood advocated the integration of African-Americans, urged the rejection of racism, and implored Southerners that they should “frown upon all such organizations as that of the Ku-Klux; encourage the education of the black man, wean from him those who would instill into his mind distrust and resentment, and make him our friend.”

After the war, Hood became close friends with former Union General William T. Sherman. On a visit to Washington, D.C. in 1879, Sherman introduced Hood to President Rutherford B. Hayes, Vice President William Wheeler, Secretary of War George McCray, and Supreme Court Chief Justice Morrison Waite. This is not how traitors are treated.

John Bell Hood, Jr. fought at the Battle of San Juan Hill as a member of Col. Teddy Roosevelt’s 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment (“The Rough Riders”) and another of Hood’s sons, Duncan Hood, graduated from West Point and also served in the Spanish-American War.

I am but a lowly enlisted veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, and I only graduated from Kentucky Military Institute, which I admit was no West Point. Regardless of your pedigree, however, I find your views on Civil War history to be harsh and extreme. They engage in historical cleansing, and the deeply divisive “cancel culture” that is in reality a “cancer culture” tearing apart the fabric of our society.

You are among those who John Bell Hood warned of in 1874, one of “*a strong minority constantly probing the wound and arousing old enmities.*”

Words, politics, and today’s technology can tear us apart just as surely as did bullets and sabers in the 1860s.

Yours truly

Stephen M. Hood