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LINCOLN THE SOLDIER

At the age of twenty-three Abraham Lincoln enlisted as a volunteer in the Black Hawk War. By virtue of his office at the time of his assassination he was Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Republic.

His first military experience in after years he viewed as a joke but the serious task confronting him in the Civil War was the most severe military task that an American has ever faced. Lincoln's early experience as a soldier offers an approach similar to those already made in these columns which have presented him as postmaster, flatboatman and railsplitter.

In 1858 he prepared some data for the Dictionary of Congress. One of the six brief sentences in the sketch was as follows:

"Have been a captain of volunteers in the Black Hawk War."

The following year he was asked for some biographical information by J. W. Fell. In the article he forwarded this paragraph appears.

"Then came the Black Hawk War and I was elected captain of volunteers, a success which gave me more pleasure than any which I have had since."

After his nomination for the presidency he was solicited by John L. Scripps to prepare a more complete biographical sketch and the reference he made to his military activities follows:

"Abraham joined a volunteer company and to his own surprise was elected captain of it. He says he has not since had any success in life which gave him so much satisfaction. He went to the campaign, served near three months, met the ordinary hardships of such an expedition but was in no battles. He now owns in Iowa the land upon which his own warrants for the service were located."

The most ludicrous account which Lincoln gives of his service in the Black Hawk War is found in a speech which he made before the United States House of Representatives on

July 27, 1848. He had occasion to speak on "General Taylor and the Veto" and in conclusion commented on the availability of General Cass for the presidency. Here he had an opportunity to compare his own military service in the Black Hawk War with that of General Cass.

"By the way, Mr. Speaker, did you know that I am a military hero? Yes, sir, in the days of the Black Hawk War I fought, bled, and came away. Speaking of General Cass' career reminds me of my own. I was not at Stillman's defeat but I was about as near it as Cass was to Hull's surrender and like him, I saw the place very soon afterwards. It is quite certain I did not break my sword for I had none to break but I bent a musket pretty badly on one occasion. If Cass broke his sword the idea is he broke it in desperation. I bent the musket by accident. If General Cass went in advance of me in picking huckleberries I guess I surpassed him in charges upon the wild onions. He, if he saw any live fighting Indians, it was more than I did but I made a good many bloody struggles with the mosquitoes and although I never fainted from the loss of blood I can truly say I was often very hungry. Mr. Speaker, if I should ever conclude to doff whatever our Democratic friends may suppose there is of black-cockade federalism about me and therefore they shall take me up as their candidate for the presidency, I protest they shall not make fun of me as they have of General Cass by attempting to write me into a military hero."

A proclamation was issued by Governor Reynolds, of Illinois, calling upon the state troops to rendezvous at Beardstown on April 22, 1832. The day before this Lincoln's confirmation as captain of his company was recorded. Jack Armstrong, his competitor in the famous wrestling match was made his first sergeant. The company became a part of the Fourth Regiment of mounted volunteers in General Whiteside's brigade.

At the expiration of the enlistment period, which occurred while they were in camp at Ottawa, opportunity was given the members of Lincoln's company to re-enlist in other units. Lincoln's name appears on the roll as of May 25, 1832, as a private in Captain Alexander White's company. The following day, however, his name was placed on the muster roll of Captain Elijah Iles' Company and for twenty days he served with this group.

Lincoln again re-enlisted this time in the company of Captain Jacob Earley and was finally mustered out at a point which is now White Water, Wisconsin, on July 10, 1832. This con-

cluded Lincoln's military experiences until he took up the more serious task of directing the armies of the Union.

It is interesting to note that among Lincoln's superior officers in this military venture were Colonel Zachary Taylor, Lieutenant Albert Sidney Johnston, Lieutenant Jefferson Davis, and Lieutenant Robert Anderson.

A large number of Lincoln's political associates in later years also served in this skirmish with the Indians.

Many different stories have been circulated about Lincoln's experiences during these months as a soldier but few of them seem to bear the impress of truth. Tales of his many contests with wrestling champions of other camps, accounts of his violating orders and failing to keep his men under the proper discipline, coming to the rescue of an old Indian who strayed into camp, etc., are but a few of the many traditions which have been featured.

Lincoln apparently remembered one scene quite vividly associated with the campaign. He helped to bury five men who had been massacred by the Indians. His reminiscence of this experience is reported as follows:

"I remember just how those men looked as we rode up to the little hill where their camp was. The red light of the morning sun was streaming upon them as they lay heads towards us on the ground. And every man had a round, red spot on the top of his head, about as big as a dollar where the redskins had taken his scalp. It was frightful, but it was grotesque, and the red sunlight seemed to paint everything all over. I remember that one man had on buckskin breeches."

Lincoln's early military experience is soon to be memorialized at Dixon, Illinois, by the erection of a heroic bronze statue. It will occupy a site where the old Dixon blockhouse stood, and where one of Lincoln's reenlistments took place. The sculptor who has done this new Lincoln is Leonard Crunelle. He recently prepared for Freeport, Illinois, a study of Lincoln the Debator. This more recent effort portrays Lincoln at the age of twenty-three years and will visualize Lincoln the Soldier.

Note:—We are having constant appeals from libraries in different parts of the United States for back numbers of Lincoln Lore to complete their files. The greatest need seems to be for the issues up to number twenty-one but especially those preceding number ten. We should be glad to supply these issues if those who do not care to keep their back numbers will forward them to the editor.