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Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

CAPTAIN ABRAHAM LINCOLN

One hundred years ago this week, on April 21, Abraham Lincoln was elected Captain of a military company which had volunteered for service in the Black Hawk War.

In a public announcement prepared less than two months before his enlistment in the militia he had said that he had "no ambition so great as that of being truly esteemed by my fellow-men by rendering myself worthy of that esteem."

Lincoln could not have surmised that he was so soon to be the recipient of a favor which would demonstrate the esteem in which he was already held by his associates. Twenty-five years later in referring to this honor bestowed upon him by these volunteers he said, "It was a success which gave me more pleasure than any which I have had since."

The office of Commander in Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic gave to Lincoln the highest military rank available to an American citizen. This fact should make the centennial anniversary of his first military experience of some significance.

The name—Lincoln—is not unfamiliar in the annals of military achievement in America. The most illustrious of the Lincolns who fought in the Revolutionary War was Benjamin Lincoln, a member of the famous Lincoln colony at Hingham, Massachusetts, from which Abraham Lincoln descended.

General Lincoln was given the chief command of the southern department of the army, and was later delegated by Washington to receive the sword of General Cornwallis at the time of his surrender.

Another one of the many Hingham Lincolns who engaged in the Revolutionary War was Captain Amos Lincoln who married the daughter of Paul Revere.

The grandfather of Abraham Lincoln for whom the president was named was elected Captain of one of the three military companies in Rockingham County, Virginia, at the time of the Revolution, and his name is

often found on the county records as having served as Adjutant General.

While the President's grandfather did not lose his life in a battle with Red-coats, he was one of the many Revolutionary soldiers who later were massacred by the Indians on the frontiers. Abraham Lincoln said that among all the stories of his youth the one that remained most vivid in his memory was the massacre of his grandfather.

Hananah Lincoln who went to Kentucky with the pioneer Lincolns was also a Captain in the Revolutionary War. It was with this Hananah Lincoln that the father of the President made his home for some time after the massacre of his own father.

Abraham Lincoln's father, Thomas Lincoln, saw service against the Indians in Kentucky as a member of the Fourth Regiment of Militia in which he enlisted in 1795. He served as a private under Lieutenant George Ewing, and later was under the command of Lieutenant Philip Washburn.

On Patriots Day, April 19, 1832, the following postscript appeared in the Sangamon Journal:

"More Indian trouble. Last evening General T. M. Neale received by express the annexed order from the Commander in Chief. From this order it appears that the Governor is determined at once to drive Black Hawk and his associates from the limits of our state. There could be no object in parleying any further with him or his gang. Summary and spirited measures must be used or our citizens will be subjected yearly to the incursions of this Indian tribe. . . .

"To General T. M. Neale: 'You are hereby commanded to cause 600 men of your Brigade to meet at Beardstown on the 22nd inst. without fail. I have ordered the Colonels of your Brigade to furnish their proportionate men out of their respective regiments, for fear you might not be at home. You will call the Militia to the nearest rendezvous, each company to be composed of 50 men and to elect its own officers.'"

When Lincoln read this appeal for volunteers in the paper he enlisted immediately. He must have recalled the story of his own grandfather's massacre and the service which his father saw against the Indians.

The day before the rendezvous of the troops at Beardstown, Abraham Lincoln was elected Captain of his company. While he saw no active fighting, there is some indication that he was worthy of the office to which he had been elected.

The one tradition that comes down to us as to Lincoln's behavior while following the enemy is from the old guide, Father Dixon, who accompanied

the troops. He concludes, "In all the marches, whenever the forces approached a grove or depression in which an Indian ambush might be concealed, and scouts were sent forward to examine the cover, Lincoln was the first man selected," and he adds that "while many, as they approached the place of expected ambush, found an excuse for dismounting to adjust girths or saddles, Lincoln's saddle was always in perfect order."

It is very appropriate that there recently has been erected at Dixon, Illinois a statue by Leonard Crunelle portraying Captain Abraham Lincoln.

In the light of subsequent events the most interesting contact which Lincoln made during the Black Hawk war was with Major Robert Anderson. When Major Anderson visited Washington after his evacuation of Fort Sumpter and had received from the chief magistrate an expression of appreciation of his conduct, Mr. Lincoln said:

"Major, do you remember of ever meeting me before?" "No," replied Anderson, "I have no recollection of ever having had that pleasure." "My memory is better than yours," said Lincoln. "You mustered me into the United States service, as a high private of the Illinois volunteers, at Dixon's Ferry, in the Black Hawk War."

Both Captain Lincoln and his superior officer, General T. M. Neale, were candidates for the legislature in 1832, but the captain polled 86 more votes than the General. Both failed to be elected, however.

Another candidate for representative at this election was William Kirkpatrick who had been Lincoln's opponent for the captaincy of the company. He received another beating at the polls by Lincoln who gathered in 657 votes against Kirkpatrick's 44. It is significant to note on Captain Lincoln's muster roll that Kirkpatrick whom he had beaten was recommended for promotion from the ranks by Captain Lincoln.

In Lincoln's company were: Jack Armstrong, the wrestler, whom Lincoln made a sergeant; William F. Berry, who was later to be associated with Lincoln in the merchandise business; John M. and David Rutledge, brothers of Ann Rutledge, Lincoln's sweetheart; and one of the Trent brothers for whom Lincoln tried his first lawsuit.

There were 68 men altogether listed on Captain Lincoln's muster roll, of which copies are still available. In Lincoln's own handwriting is the following notation, "Mustered out of service at the Mouth of Fox River, May 27, 1832."