

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

No. 286

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

October 1, 1934

FATHER ABRAHAM'S BOY ARMY

There has been much speculation about the average age of the soldiers who served in the Union Army during the Civil War. There is no compilation made from official records which will allow one to make an accurate summary. An approach to the question can be made, however, through information records compiled by the Statistical Bureau of the United States Sanitary Commission for the year 1866 supplied for this monograph by the Adjutant General's Office at Washington, D. C. These figures were made available after the muster rolls containing the names of about 1,000,000 men had been examined by the Commission.

Approximately 30% of the troops were under twenty-one years of age. Another 30% were from twenty-one to twenty-four inclusive. A third group totaling 30% consisted of soldiers from twenty-five to thirty inclusive. This leaves but 10% of the army over 30 years of age.

There were some very young boys who saw service in the army, which will account for the many cases coming before President Lincoln calling for clemency and which indirectly reveals his humanity in dealing with military cases that ordinarily would call for severe punishment.

A Discouraged Cadet

Lincoln's attitude of mind towards boys can best be understood by reading a letter he wrote to a cadet at West Point. As busy as he was in the summer of 1862, he took time to pen this word of encouragement to Cadet Quentin Campbell whom he had never seen:

"Your good mother tells me you are feeling very badly in your new situation—Allow me to assure you it is a perfect certainty that you will, very soon, feel better—quite happy—if you only stick to the resolution you have taken to procure a military education—I am older than you, have felt badly myself, and know what I tell you is true. Adhere to your purpose and you will soon feel as well as you ever did—On the contrary, if you falter, and give up, you will lose the power of keeping any resolution, and will regret it all your life. Take the advice of a friend, who, though he never saw you, deeply sympathizes with you, and stick to your purpose."

A Boy and the Great Union

For some reason, unknown, a boy had been arrested and his case called to Lincoln's attention. This was Lincoln's reaction as recorded by his own hand on April 10, 1862:

"What possible injury can this lad work upon the cause of the great Union? I say let him go."

The Lieutenants' Future

Several young lieutenants had been cashiered by court marshal for misconduct at a battle on June 27, 1862. The cases of at least two of them were called to the attention of the President who enclosed for General McClellan a letter from the Judge Advocate along with his own recommendation as follows:

"I shall be obliged if you and the regimental officers can, consistently with your sense of duty to the service, act upon the suggestion of the Judge Advocate's letter. I am very unwilling for these young men to be ruined for so slight causes."

A New Year's Gift

One of Lincoln's gifts for the New Year, 1863, is recorded in the signed order:

"Let this woman have her boy out of old Capitol Prison."

A Lad of "Tender Age"

A seventeen year old boy had been placed under military arrest in 1863 and Lincoln wrote to General Mead:

"I therefore on account of his tender age, have concluded to pardon him, and to leave it to yourself, whether to discharge him or continue him in the service."

An Unspanked Youth

A Leavenworth, Kansas, boy ran away to the war. He was but fourteen years of age and his case was finally called to Lincoln's attention. The President wrote a note for him to present to Stanton which the boy read in Lincoln's presence and then began to cry. The note read:

"Hadn't we better spank this drummer boy and send him back home to Leavenworth?"

The boy didn't get the spanking, but Lincoln took him to a hotel and arranged for transportation to his home.

Shooting Boys

In the Fall of 1863 a boy at Mitchels Station, Virginia, was ordered to be shot as a deserter. Lincoln wrote to Major General Mead:

"I am unwilling for any boy under eighteen to be shot and his father affirms that he is yet under sixteen."

A Fine Little Boy

Apparently Lincoln's contacts with the boys he met were not formal and cold. This note which he wrote on December 13, 1864, is one of the best indexes to his character. It will be observed how the appeal on behalf of the boy approaches a command in the peculiar wording of the memorandum:

"I shall be glad if Capt. Goodenow can and will find a suitable position for this fine little boy."

Boys Who Disobey Parents

Lincoln was not always pleased with every boy with whom he came in contact. To Secretary Welles he wrote:

"The United States don't need the services of boys who disobey their parents. Let both Snyder and Ratcliff be discharged."

Grey Suited Boys

It was not always the boys in blue whom Lincoln befriended. A boy was a boy to him whether his coat was blue or grey. The following note addressed to the Secretary of War will serve as an example of many such cases of which he disposed:

"My dear Sir: A young son of Senator Brown of Mississippi, not yet twenty, as I understand, was wounded and made a prisoner at Gettysburg. His mother is a sister of Mrs. P. R. Fendall, of this city. Mr. Fendall, on behalf of himself and family, asks that he and they may have charge of the boy to cure him up, being responsible for his person and good behavior. Would it not be rather a grateful and graceful thing to let them have him?"