

LINCOLN LORE

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CONFERENCES OF LINCOLN AND GRANT

The names of Lincoln and Grant are inseparable in American history, yet strange to say, although they were contemporaries engaged in the same gigantic enterprise of saving the Union, they were associated with each other on but few occasions and were personally acquainted only thirteen months.

In February 1862, Lincoln wrote to Halleck about the possibility of Grant's being overwhelmed by the enemy and, in April, wrote again to Halleck asking if any "neglect or misconduct of General Grant" contributed to recent reverses of the Union troops. It was not until after the battle of Vicksburg in July 1863, that the President had occasion to write a personal letter directly to General Grant. He said in part:

"My Dear General: I do not remember that you and I ever met personally. I write this now as a grateful acknowledgment for the almost inestimable service you have done the country . . . When you turned northward, east of the Big Black, I feared it was a mistake. I now wish to make a personal acknowledgment that you were right and I was wrong."

In another letter of appreciation written to Grant on December 8 Lincoln said:

"I wish to tender you, and all under your command, my more than thanks, my profoundest gratitude, for the skill, courage, and perseverance with which you and they, over so great difficulties, have effected that important object. God bless you all!"

Lincoln Meets Grant

Abraham Lincoln first met General Grant at a White House reception on the evening of March 8, 1864. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln received in the Blue Room during the earlier part of the evening, and Mr. Lincoln was still greeting guests when about 9:30 a slight commotion at the entrance of the room indicated the arrival of some distinguished person. It proved to be General Grant.

The General had just come from the Army, and, although he had been in the Capitol city but once before, his first inclination was to pay his respects to the President. He was recognized immediately upon arrival at the executive mansion.

Mr. Lincoln's excessive height allowed him at all times to observe what was going on about him, and he recognized the General at once from his widely published photograph.

An eye-witness describes the meeting of these illustrious men:

"With a face radiant with delight the President advanced rapidly towards his distinguished visitor and cried out: 'Why here is General Grant! Well this is a great pleasure I assure you', and at the same time seizing him by the hand and shaking it for several minutes with a vigor which showed the extreme cordiality of the meeting."

That evening the President made an appointment with Grant for the formal presentation of the commission of Lieutenant-General which was to be tendered him upon the following day at one o'clock.

Mr. Lincoln said, "General Grant, the Nation's appreciation of what you have done, and its reliance upon you for what remains to do in the existing great struggle, are now presented, with this commission constituting you Lieutenant-General in the Army of the United States. With this high honor devolves upon you, also, a corresponding responsibility. As the country herein trusts you, so, under God, it will sustain you. I scarcely need to add that with what I here speak for the nation, goes my own hearty personal concurrence."

General Grant replied, "Mr. President, I accept this commission with gratitude for the high honor conferred. With the aid of the noble armies that have fought on so many fields for our common country, it will be my earnest endeavor not to disappoint your expectations. I feel the full weight of the responsibilities now devolving on me; and I

know that if they are met, it will be due to those armies, and above all to the favor of that Providence which leads both nations and men."

Grant had arrived in Washington on March 8, the commission was presented on the 9th. He was with General Meade at Brandy Station on the 10th, returned to Washington on the 11th and that very evening started for the west.

Casual Interviews

With the exception of two or three hurried conferences, Lincoln saw little of Grant until the closing days of the war. Lincoln did take occasion to write a letter of encouragement to Grant on April 30, and it has become one of the most famous pieces of war correspondence. It follows:

"Not expecting to see you again before the spring campaign opens, I wish to express in this way my entire satisfaction with what you have done up to this time, so far as I understand it. The particulars of your plans I neither know nor seek to know. You are vigilant and self-reliant; and, pleased with this, I wish not to obtrude any constraints or restraints upon you. While I am very anxious that any great disaster or capture of our men in great numbers shall be avoided, I know these points are less likely to escape your attention than they would be mine. If there is anything wanting which is within my power to give, do not fail to let me know it. And now, with a brave army and a just cause, may God sustain you."

City Point Conference

Robert Lincoln, oldest son of the President, early in 1865 became a member of Grant's staff with the rank of captain.

On March 20, General Grant invited Lincoln to visit City Point, and Lincoln immediately accepted the invitation. On March 23 he telegraphed Grant:

"We start to you at one p.m. today. May lie over during the dark hours of the night. Very small party of us."

About nine o'clock in the evening of the following day, the President and his group arrived at City Point on the "River Queen", which boat was used as their headquarters. Lincoln not only had an opportunity on this visit to see much of General Grant but on the 28th there occurred the famous conference on the "River Queen" in which President Lincoln, Generals Grant and Sherman and Admiral Porter participated.

The following day Grant started on his final drive to Appomattox. Five days later Petersburg, nine miles from City Point, was evacuated and Grant sent a telegram to Lincoln who was still at City Point, inviting him to visit the victorious troops. Lincoln again was in conference with Grant at Petersburg. The fall of Richmond was announced when Lincoln returned from Petersburg to City Point and he immediately started for that city. The President was back in Washington again on Sunday evening, April 9.

It might be said that Lincoln was an eye-witness to the closing scenes of the conflict in which Grant played such an important part. He had been at the front with the soldiers for sixteen days.

The Last Meeting

Grant arrived in Washington on the morning of April 13 for what proved to be his last visit with the President. The general attended cabinet meeting on the morning of April 14, and this meeting was followed by several conferences. General and Mrs. Grant had been invited by President and Mrs. Lincoln to attend a theater performance at Ford's Theater that night, but other plans interfered and they left the city at 6:00 p.m. for Burlington.

It is difficult to anticipate what might have happened if Grant had suffered the same fate as Lincoln in the Ford's Theater box that evening. Grant as a martyr might have been a greater menace to the South in the reconstruction program which followed than he was as the head of the Union Army during the civil strife.