

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN AND SCOTT

General Scott wrote a letter to President Buchanan, one week before the Presidential election of 1860, in which he revealed that he anticipated the election of Abraham Lincoln. He said in part: "From a sense of propriety as a soldier, I have taken no part in the impending canvass . . . With Mr. Lincoln I have had no communication whatever direct or indirect and have no recollection of ever having seen his person." Scott had favored the candidacy of Bell and Everett in the political contest of 1860.

Elihu Washburne of Illinois called on General Scott in Washington on December 17. Scott desired to know if Lincoln was a firm man, and Washburne replied that Lincoln would do his duty "in the sight of the furnace seven times heated." The interview was reported to Lincoln who asked Washburne to present his (Lincoln's) respects to Scott and added, "I shall be obliged to him to be as well prepared as he can to either hold or retake the forts, as the case may require at and after the inauguration." Whether or not to reinforce the government fortifications in the south was the burning question before the Buchanan administration.

Senator Cameron of Pennsylvania visited General Scott on January 3, 1861 and brought with him a message of greeting from President-elect Lincoln. That very evening Cameron wrote reporting the results of his conference. He advised Lincoln that "the old warrior is aroused" and would be equal to any emergency which might arise with respect to the inauguration.

General Scott also wrote to Lincoln after the Cameron interview, assuring the President-elect that he might rely on General Scott's "utmost exertions in the service of his country (the Union) both before and after the inauguration."

When the new administration was about to come into power, an increasing number of letters reached Lincoln advising him that he would not be permitted to survive his inauguration. Lincoln was anxious to know just what preparations were being made in Washington of a military nature which would assure the inaugural services being conducted with order and precision. He sent Thomas S. Mather, Adjutant-General of Illinois, to interview General Scott late in January 1861.

Although Lincoln felt that Scott could be depended upon, the fact that he was a Virginian caused him to wonder whether or not in the impending crisis he would allow his loyalty to his native state to overshadow his loyalty to the Union. Mather was advised to secure an interview and listen carefully to the old man. "Look him in the face, note carefully what he says and how he says it, and then, when you return with your report I shall probably be well enough informed to determine with some degree of accuracy where he stands and what to expect of him." General Scott said to Mather:

"You may present my compliments to Mr. Lincoln when you reach Springfield, and tell him I shall expect him to come on to Washington as soon as he is ready. Say to him also that, when once here, I shall consider myself responsible for his safety. If necessary, I shall plant cannon at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, and if any of the Maryland or Virginia gentlemen who have become so threatening and troublesome of late show their heads or even venture to raise a finger, I shall blow them to hell!"

After this report by Mather, there was no question in Lincoln's mind about the loyalty of General Scott, and the first real test of Scott's loyalty came on February 13 when the electoral college convened to count the votes cast for President. It was rumored that those opposed to Lincoln would never allow the vote to be counted, but General Scott placed military guards at every entrance to the

Capitol with orders to admit no one without admission tickets signed by either the Speaker or the Vice-President. Two batteries of regular artillery stood before the old Capitol across the square.

With the same care Scott prepared for Lincoln's inaugural, and the city fairly bristled with weapons of defense. The result was that Lincoln's inaugural became a matter of fact.

With the existing emergency at Fort Sumter, Scott received what was virtually his first war order from the chief executive on March 9, 1861. It called upon General Scott "to exercise all possible vigilance for the maintenance of all places within the military department of the United States . . ." On the same day Lincoln wrote a letter to Scott asking some information about the feasibility of reinforcements for Sumter.

With the evacuation of Sumter and the call for troops, the war was well under way, and on April 1 Lincoln asked Scott to make "short comprehensive daily reports" of what was occurring in his department. Although seriously incapacitated by illness and old age, General Scott continued to direct the forces of the Union until November 1, 1861.

"Executive Mansion,
Washington, November 1, 1861.

"On the 1st day of November, A. D. 1861, upon his own application to the President of the United States, Brevet Lieutenant-General Winfield Scott is ordered to be placed, and hereby is placed, upon the list of retired officers of the army of the United States, without reduction in his current pay, subsistence, or allowances.

"The American people will hear with sadness and deep emotion that General Scott has withdrawn from the active control of the army, while the President and a unanimous cabinet express their own and the nation's sympathy in his personal afflictions, and their profound sense of the important public services rendered by him to his country during his long and brilliant career, among which will ever be gratefully distinguished his faithful devotion to the Constitution, the Union, and the flag when assailed by parricidal rebellion.

"Abraham Lincoln."

The last letter which Lincoln wrote to General Scott was sent on March 1, 1865, just two weeks before the President was assassinated. He replied to the General and his associates who were members of a Sanitary Commission, "I shall at all times be ready to recognize the paramount claims of the soldiers of the nation in the disposition of public trusts. I shall be glad also to make these suggestions to the several heads of departments."

Winfield Scott was born in Dinwiddie County, Virginia on June 13, 1786. He was educated at William and Mary College and, by the time Lincoln was born, was a captain of light infantry. He came out of the War of 1812 a major-general and was at Chicago in 1832, at which time there occurred the Black Hawk skirmish for which Lincoln enlisted. Scott failed to reach the front and did not meet Lincoln at that time. He became commander-in-chief of the armies of the United States as early as 1841. The war with Mexico added greatly to the prestige of the General and he was a candidate for the Presidency in 1852 but was defeated. In 1859 Scott was made a lieutenant-general, the rank having been established by Congress for his benefit. His advanced age prohibited him from engaging in the strenuous task of directing the Union forces in the Civil War, and he was retired from active service on November 1, 1861. He lived long enough to see the war brought to a close, passing away at West Point on May 29, 1866.