

# LINCOLN LORE

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## MERCY AT THE FRONT

The presence of modern military leaders among the troops at the beginning of a major offensive has a tendency to inspire the men to greater valor and heroic effort. It is not often that the commander-in-chief approaches the theater of a titanic struggle as a messenger of mercy.

Abraham Lincoln set out for General Grant's headquarters the latter part of March, 1865, to be in the field if possible when peace agreements were arranged, and, according to Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, so "that severe terms shall not be exacted from the Rebels."

*Thursday, March 23*—Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln and Tad with their attendants left the Sixth Street wharf at Washington at one p. m. on the steamer, River Queen. They were bound for City Point, Grant's headquarters, about twenty miles south of Richmond, Virginia, the capitol of the Confederacy. They proceeded down the Potomac that afternoon, and Lincoln had informed General Grant that their boat would probably "lie over during the dark hours of the night."

*Friday, March 24*—The River Queen continued down Chesapeake Bay as far as Norfolk and then started up the James River, arriving that afternoon at City Point. General Grant came aboard in the evening to welcome them.

*Saturday, March 25*—At breakfast there was a family reunion on the River Queen when Captain Robert Lincoln came to greet the rest of the family. He reported a skirmish that morning which the President called in his report to Stanton "a little rumpus." Later the President rode on a military train toward the front and saw dead and wounded men on every side. At one o'clock he viewed Crawford's Division and later rode to the front lines with General Meade and saw the army in action. At the close of the day Lincoln is said to have remarked that "he had seen enough of the horrors of war." He was so deeply moved that he ate no supper and retired immediately.

*Sunday, March 26*—While visiting in the telegraph operator's tent, he observed three small kittens at play and soon had all of them in his lap, tenderly caressing them. Later the River Queen moved through a naval flotilla; and then the President lunched with Admiral Porter on his flagship, Malvern. In the afternoon the River Queen anchored at Aikin's Landing, where General Sheridan came on board to welcome the Commander-in-Chief. The review of the Army of the James which followed was carried out in the very atmosphere of military activities, and from the parade grounds the army went into action. The River Queen returned to its mooring that evening at City Point.

*Monday, March 27*—The morning was spent at Grant's headquarters along with Admiral Porter. In the afternoon General Sherman arrived. After visiting General Grant, Sherman, accompanied by Grant and Porter, called on the President who had retired to the River Queen. Sherman reviewed for Lincoln incidents of his famous march.

*Tuesday, March 28*—Lincoln, Grant, and Sherman, along with Porter representing the Navy, met on the River Queen in the morning for what might well be called the most important conference of the supreme military leaders during the war. Grant and Sherman felt that one of them would have to engage in at least one more major contest. Whereupon Lincoln inquired "if another battle could not be avoided." No guarantees were made. At this conference Lincoln made an appeal for a lenient attitude towards the enemy upon surrender, and it was undoubtedly for such a conference as this that the City Point visit had been planned by the President. Sherman said when he left Lincoln he was more than ever impressed with Lincoln's "deep and earnest sympathy with the afflictions of the whole people."

*Wednesday, March 29*—Lincoln in the early morning saw Grant and his staff off to the front at Petersburg where the final drive was to take place. It started to rain that day, however, which retarded the advance of the Union troops.

*Thursday, March 30*—Another whole day it rained and Lincoln began to get restless. He thought some of returning to Washington, and so telegraphed Stanton, but he was still very anxious to see the troops in a movement which he was confident would bring about the close of the war.

*Friday, March 31*—On the last day of March Lincoln had been away from Washington a week, and on this day Secretary Seward came down on business, possibly to assure him all was going well at the capital.

*Saturday, April 1*—Seward started for Fortress Monroe and Mrs. Lincoln decided to return to Washington, leaving Tad with the President. But no sooner had they left than the long-looked-for military action began.

*Sunday, April 2*—By the evening of April 2 it was very certain that the final push was under way and Petersburg was being evacuated by Lee. Lincoln telegraphed to Grant, "Allow me to tender to you and all with you the nation's gratitude for this additional and magnificent success."

*Monday, April 3*—Lincoln was now making his headquarters on the flagship, Malvern, and Jefferson Davis, who had been at Richmond but twenty miles away, was in flight towards Danville. The Confederate troops had fired Richmond and at 8:15 General Weitzel announced the capture of the Confederate capitol.

*Tuesday, April 4*—The Malvern with Lincoln aboard moved up near Richmond and the President with his boy, Tad, Admiral Porter, and a few sailors entered the city unannounced and without military escort. The distance from Rockett's Landing to the Confederate Executive Mansion was about two miles, and the party walked the entire distance. History does not record a more humble triumphant entry of a captured city by a commander-in-chief of an army. All Lincoln asked for on arrival at the southern White House was a glass of water.

*Wednesday, April 5*—The Confederate Assistant Secretary of War visited Lincoln and General Weitzel on the Malvern lying just off Richmond and talked peace terms and the restoration of Union authority in Virginia. The Malvern then steamed back to City Point.

*Thursday, April 6*—Lincoln received a telegram that Secretary Seward had been thrown from his carriage and seriously injured. Mrs. Lincoln and a party of friends arrived from Washington at City Point and visited Richmond.

*Friday, April 7*—The President and his party entrained for Petersburg. Sheridan advised Grant, "If the thing be pressed I think Lee will surrender." Upon hearing this, Lincoln wired Grant, "Let the thing be pressed"; and it was.

*Saturday, April 8*—This last day at the front the merciful Lincoln spent five hours visiting the hospitals and brought cheer and hope to hundreds of injured and dying men.

*Sunday, April 9*—Lincoln's last Sunday on earth was spent on the beautiful Potomac as the River Queen moved towards Washington. It was a quiet, restful day with the discussion of politics taboo and literature the theme. Upon reaching Washington, Lincoln, the merciful, immediately went to the bedside of the injured Seward where he ministered to the Secretary's hunger for information from the front. The Chief Executive's visit to City Point was the only extended period away from his desk in four long years. Before another Sunday dawned the President was dead.