

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S SECRET SERVICE SLEUTH

James F. Jaquess was one of the outstanding heroes of the Civil War, but his name is seldom mentioned, except in connection with the Jaquess-Gilmore Peace Mission. Although he failed in the ultimate purpose of his peace enterprise, Mr. Lincoln saw immediately that Jaquess could become very useful to him as a secret service sleuth. The following letter paved the way for his induction into secret service enterprise conducted by the President.

"Executive Mansion,

"Washington, May 18, 1864.

"To whom it may concern:

"Colonel James F. Jaquess, of the Seventy-third Illinois Volunteers, is hereby given leave of absence until further orders.

"A. Lincoln"

Jaquess was still working under Mr. Lincoln's direction at the time of the President's death. Inasmuch as he was never reimbursed for the expenditures which he personally met during his special service, it was necessary for him to petition Congress for redress. It is from a little known senate document (42D Congress, 2d Session, Senate, Report No. 64) that we learn of the interesting episodes in which he was engaged at Mr. Lincoln's order. A few of the questions and answers at this hearing before the Senate Committee are here reproduced.

First Richmond Visit

"Q. To what place did you first go?
—A. I first went to Richmond. In going to Richmond I went by way of Baltimore, and from there to Fortress Monroe, and thence to General Grant's headquarters. General Grant put me through the lines on Mr. Lincoln's letter which I showed him.

"Q. Did you go through the lines to Richmond and have an interview with Jefferson Davis?—A. Yes, sir.

"Q. How long did you remain in Richmond?—A. I remained in Richmond three days.

"Q. Where then did you go?—A. After leaving Richmond I came to Washington, and reported in person to Mr. Lincoln.

"Q. Did you make a report to Mr. Lincoln, or to any person under his orders, of the substance of your interview with Davis?—A. I made a full report to Mr. Lincoln. He was then living out at the Soldier's Home. I went out there and staid all night with him, and made a full verbal report. I had written nothing; I was afraid to carry anything in writing. Afterwards, Senator Harlan came to me, and said that he wished a full copy of my report to Mr. Lincoln, and I sat down in a room with him and Mr. Sutton, a reporter, who took it down in short-hand, and it was written out in full."

Niagara Falls Missions

"Q. On what other secret service did you then go?—A. When I returned from Richmond, Mr. Lincoln saw, from the report that I made to him, that he was about to commit a very serious blunder in reference to the Niagara Falls negotiations, and he told me to go there with all possible dispatch and see what there was of that; or, in other words, he remarked to me, 'I want you to crack that nut immediately.' I went there at once and had an interview with those parties at Niagara Falls.

"Q. Who were those parties?—A. Clay and Thompson.

"Q. Clement C. Clay and Jacob Thompson?—A. Yes, sir; Clement C. Clay and Jacob Thompson were the only parties I saw; there were other parties there, but I had no interviews with any except those two.

"Q. Were you at Niagara Falls at the time there was held at that place a sort of convention of rebel leaders and sympathizers and spies, with some persons from the United States who went over to confer with them?—A. I was there at Mr. Lincoln's request. I had made a second visit to those parties before that. I gained access, however, to that convention, as it was called, through Mr. Buchanan.

"Q. When you left Niagara Falls, did you report to Mr. Lincoln?—A. I reported to Mr. Lincoln at that time, and that was the last time I saw him for some weeks.

"Q. You made two journeys to Niagara Falls?—A. Three.

"Q. And reported what you had discovered there to Mr. Lincoln regularly?—A. Yes, sir; personally.

"Q. Did you report in writing or verbally?—A. I reported verbally in two cases, in the first two instances, and on the last occasion in writing."

Second Richmond Visit

"Q. Where did you go after that on secret services?—A. I went into the confederate lines a second time.

"Q. Where did you go when you passed through the confederate lines?
A. I went to Petersburg, and I was also in Richmond. . . . My next business was to go into the confederate lines to look after a plot that was supposed to be in existence, to burn northern cities, and shipping belonging to the United States. . . . I gained access to a gentleman who was acting at the time as the head of the chemical department of the confederate government. . . .

"Q. Had he been employed by the confederate authorities to make this match?—A. Yes, sir.

"Q. And the confederate authorities had authorized him to contrive this match for the purpose of doing this vast mischief in northern cities?—A.

Yes, sir; and John C. Breckenridge was a leading man in it."

The Governor Seymour Mission

"Q. What next?—A. I next went to the governor of the State of New York.

"Q. Under the orders of Mr. Lincoln?—A. At the request of Mr. Lincoln.

"Q. Who was the governor of New York at that time?—A. Horatio Seymour.

"Q. Did you have an interview with him; and, if so, what was it?—A. I had an interview with him by Mr. Lincoln's request. I explained to him, entirely and in full, my visit (first) to Richmond, and all the points connected with it. Mr. Lincoln wished me especially to state to him the fact that I had elicited from Mr. Davis that they were not fighting for slavery, that they were fighting for their independence, and he had repeated it to me under the head of three different propositions, 'our independence we will have, or we will have annihilation.' Mr. Lincoln requested me to state these facts to Governor Seymour, which I did. I spent three days with him in private, and he seemed rather loth then to let me go.

"Q. The narrative you gave to Mr. Seymour respecting your conversation with Jefferson Davis, in your judgment, had a favorable effect upon Governor Seymour's mind?—A. It had not only a favorable effect, but it made him a different man; and so it did every man of that class that I talked to. . . .

The Horace Greeley Mission

"Q. Where did you go next?—A. From the 1st of December, 1864 to the 1st of January, 1865, I was not very actively engaged, although I was reconciling certain parties who had ill-feelings toward Mr. Lincoln, to whom he wished private explanations to be made. Among these was Mr. Greeley, with reference to his visit to Niagara Falls. I went to Mr. Greeley, but he was very much incensed at Mr. Lincoln. . . . He called Mr. Lincoln a liar, and would not hear my explanation really about the change in Mr. Lincoln's plans in reference to the Niagara Falls affair. Mr. Lincoln was very desirous that the facts in the case should be explained to Mr. Greeley."

The Indiana and Illinois Conferences

"Q. What was your next service?
A. After the 1st of January I was West. I was in the state of Illinois and also in Indiana, on private duties; matters that did not amount to a great deal, but still something to Mr. Lincoln. He wanted some parties set right who did not understand him correctly.

"Q. And you proceeded under his orders? A. Yes, sir, under his orders."