

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN WITH THE NAVY AT NORFOLK

The emphasis placed by most historians on Lincoln's visit to Grant and his Army in which he was merely an observer, and the subsequent visit to Richmond, has obscured, to a great extent, his visit to Commodore Goldsborough of the Navy, and the subsequent capture of Norfolk, on which mission the President was something more than an observer. In fact, we might call Lincoln's movements during the week, beginning March 6, 1862, his only active participation in personally directing the armed forces of the Nation.

Secretary Chase who was a member of the President's party while on the expedition wrote to his daughter, Janet, incidents which were happening from day to day, and from copies of these letters the following excerpts in this monograph are made:

Monday, May 5

"... Left Washington on Monday evening just before dusk. Our party consisted of the President, Mr. Stanton, General Viele—who had just returned from Port Royal, where he commanded a brigade—and myself of course. Our staunch little Miami bore us rapidly and pleasantly down the river.

Tuesday, May 6

"We passed Aquia about daybreak, and at noon found ourselves tossing upon the waters of the Chesapeake. It would have amused you to see us at our luncheon. The President gave it up almost as soon as he began, and, declaring himself too uncomfortable to eat, stretched himself at length upon the locker.

"We kept steadily on, and between eight and nine o'clock reached our destination. . . . After a short conference it was determined that the President, Mr. Stanton, General Wool and myself, with General Viele, should visit Commodore Goldsborough (on the *Minnesota*) and talk with him about the condition of things and of the things to be done.

"... Round on the port side we went, and there were the narrow steps up the lofty side, and the guiding-ropes on either hand, hardly visible in the darkness. It seemed to me very high to the deck, and the ascent a little fearful. Etiquette required the President to go first and he went.

Wednesday, May 7

"Mr. Stanton proposed we should visit the *Vanderbilt*. . . . From the *Vanderbilt* we sailed round the *Monitor*

and the *Stevens*, and then back to the dock. . . . General Wool proposed that we should ride out to camp and see what was to be seen. The President and I went on horseback, while Mr. Stanton and his Assistant-Secretary, Mr. Tucker, went in a carriage, and we started; General Wool and his staff forming a most brilliant feature of our cortege.

"When we arrived at the camp, we found the troops as well prepared as the suddenness of the order admitted. Already one regiment was drawn up in line, and the colonel and his troops were made glad by the President, who rode along their line alone, uncovered, and inspiring a great enthusiasm. It is delightful, by-the-way, to observe everywhere the warm affection felt and expressed for the President. After the review, we returned to headquarters, where a consultation took place, which resulted in an order from the President to Flag-officer Goldsborough to send the *Galena* and two gunboats up the James River toward Richmond.

Thursday, May 8

"We came ashore early, having been brought down by a tug. Commodore Goldsborough came at the same time on a summons from the President, and it was then determined that an attack should be made on the batteries on Sewall's Point. After the order had been given, the President, Mr. Stanton and myself, went over to the *Rip-Raps* in a tug to observe its execution. It was not a great while before the ships were in motion. The *Seminole* took the lead, followed by the *San Jacinto* and the *Dakota*, and finally the *Susquehanna*, whose captain, Lardner, was the commanding officer of the vessels engaged. With these ships were the *Monitor*, and the little gunboat *Stevens*.

Friday, May 9

"When I got back to the *Fortress*, I found the President had been listening to a pilot and studying a chart, and had become impressed with a conviction that there was a nearer landing, and wished to go and see it at once. So we started again, and soon reached the shore; taking with us a large boat and some twenty armed soldiers from the *Rip-Raps*. The President and Mr. Stanton were on the tug and I on the *Miami*. The tug was of course nearest the shore, and as soon as she found the water too shallow for her to go farther safely, the *Rip-Raps* boat was manned. Meantime I had the *Miami* prepared for action, her long-range gun trained on shore, with her other pieces ready for support, and directed the captain

to land with both boats and all the men they could take fully armed. Before this could be done, however, several horsemen who seemed to be soldiers of the enemy, appeared on the beach. I sent to the President to ask if we should fire on them, and he replied negatively.

Saturday, May 10

"We breakfasted at six o'clock, and got away as promptly as possible. When we reached the place selected for the landing, we found that a considerable body of troops had already gone forward. I then took the tug and went along the shore to the point where the President's boat had attempted to land the evening before, and found it only about three-quarters of a mile distant.

Sunday, May 11

"The President had determined to return to Washington at seven o'clock. I arose at six, and just before seven went into the parlor, where I found Flag-officer Goldsborough, who astonished and gratified us all by telling us that the rebels had set fire to the *Merrimac*, and had blown her up. It was then determined that, before leaving, we would go up in the steamer *Baltimore*—which was to convey us to Washington—to the point where the suicide had been performed, and above the obstructions in the channel if possible, so as to be sure of the access to Norfolk by water, which had been intercepted by the exploded ship. This was done, but it took us longer than we supposed it would. We went up to the wharves of Norfolk, where, in the Elizabeth River, were already lying the *Monitor*, the *Stevens*, the *Susquehanna*, and one or two other vessels. General Wool and Commodore Goldsborough had come up with us on the *Baltimore*, and as soon as they were transferred to the *Susquehanna*, our prow was turned down-stream, and touching for a moment at the *Fortress*, we kept on our way toward Washington.

"So ended a brilliant week's campaign by the President; for I think it quite certain that if he had not gone down, Norfolk would still have been in possession of the enemy, and the *Merrimac* as grim and defiant, and as much a terror as ever. The whole coast is now virtually ours, for there is no port which the *Monitor* and the *Stevens* cannot take."