

LINCOLN LORE

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THE GROWING STATURE OF GRANT

The stature of Ulysses Grant grows with each succeeding episode in Kenneth Williams' third installment of his five volume history entitled *Lincoln Finds a General*. The author performs a difficult biographical task by arresting the chronological progress of the story at its height of interest on the eastern front, to go back and pick up a detailed account of earlier events which happen in the western theatre of the war. This allows Williams to give special attention to the gradual and impressive development of Grant from the rank of a retired captain to a prospective leader of all the Union forces. The appearance of Williams important book seems to create a proper atmosphere to present fragments of documents which reveal interesting contacts between Lincoln and Grant which show the general's steady progress.

The end sheets in the back of Williams third volume present a facsimile of a letter written by the President to the Secretary of War on July 30, 1861. The opening paragraph begins with this request: "In addition to those named in my note of yesterday, please send me nominations as Brigadier Generals of Volunteers, for Ulysses S. Grant, . . ."

The first letter which Grant wrote to Lincoln was on behalf of Maj. J. N. Cook, a paymaster whom Grant recommended should be transferred from the volunteer to the regular service for his efficient handling of funds.

Apparently Lincoln's first letter of commendation to Grant was sent on Oct. 8, 1862 when he wrote, "I congratulate you and all concerned in your recent battles and victories . . ." Possibly Grant's achievements at this time were responsible for this excerpt found in a letter from Halleck to Grant on Jan. 31, 1863: "The President has directed that so much of Arkansas as you may desire to control be temporarily attached to your department." It was in this same letter, however, that Grant's order "expelling all Jews" from his department was looked upon unfavorably by the President and the order was annulled.

One of the finest military letters Lincoln ever wrote was dated July 13, 1863 and directed to Major General Grant. The letter opens with the salutation "My dear General": and continues, "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 . . ." On December 8th of the same year another complimentary letter was received by Grant from the President on the success at Chattanooga and Knoxville: "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."

Certainly a high point in Grant's official recognition came with his commission as Lieutenant-General. The President addressed him personally on March 9, 1864 as follows: "General Grant: The nation's appreciation of what you have done, and its reliance upon you for what remains to do, in the existing 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 add, that with what I here speak for the nation, goes my own hearty personal concurrence."

To the President the new Lieutenant-General responded:

"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."

It was the correspondence which passed between Lincoln and Grant on April 30 and May 1, 1864, respectively, that reaches the highest achievement of military communications between the two men:

"Lieutenant-General Grant: 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.

Yours very truly,
A. Lincoln."

From the Head-quarters of the Armies of the United States at Culpepper Court-House, on May 1, 1864. Grant replied:

"The President,—Your very kind letter of yesterday is just received. The confidence you express for the future and satisfaction for the past in my military administration is acknowledged with pride. It shall be my earnest endeavor that you and the country shall not be disappointed. From my first entrance into the volunteer service of the country to the present day I have never had cause or complaint, have never expressed or implied a complaint against the Administration or the Secretary of War for throwing any embarrassment in the way of my vigorously prosecuting what appeared to be my duty.

"Indeed since the promotion which placed me in command of all the armies, and in view of the great responsibility and importance of success, I have been astonished at the readiness which every thing asked for has been yielded, without even an explanation being asked. Should my success be less than I desire and expect, the least I can say is, the fault is not with you.

"Very truly, your obedient servant,
"U. S. Grant, Lieutenant-General."

As the war comes to a close Lincoln had the opportunity to observe Grant at work from nearby City Point, Va. where the President arrived at on the morning of March 23. On April 6 he directed from City Point a note to General Grant "in the Field" with this concluding sentence, "Nothing that I have done, or probably shall do, is to delay, hinder, or interfere with your work." However, the classic from Mr. Lincoln's pen in his relation with Grant came on the following day, when he sent this message to the Lieutenant-General:

"General Sheridan says, 'If the thing is pressed I think that Lee will surrender.' Let the thing be pressed."