

LINCOLN LORE

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PINKERTON STALKS THE PRESIDENT

One of the most contemptuous acts perpetrated against Lincoln during his administration was Allan Pinkerton's stalking of the President upon orders of General McClellan. When one views the pictures of Pinkerton taken with the President at Antietam it is difficult to believe that on that very day he was shadowing Lincoln and reporting to McClellan the results of his observations. Some of the reports which Pinkerton sent to McClellan were printed in a book by Horan and Swiggett, published by G. P. Putnam's Sons in 1951 and entitled *The Pinkerton Story*. These reports have provided much of the source material for this monograph.

Allan Pinkerton, the founder of the detective agency bearing his name, is usually associated with Lincoln history because of the evidence he gathered about an alleged plot to take the President-elect's life at Baltimore on his way to Washington. Pinkerton stated upon learning of the conspiracy, "I felt impelled by my sense of duty, and my long friendship for Mr. Lincoln to make the information known to the proper authorities." Pinkerton later had an interview with Mr. Lincoln about the plot. The detective's findings, supplemented by evidence gathered by Secy. Seward, seemed to warrant the secret night trip of the President from Harrisburg, Pa., to Washington.

Very little attention has been paid, however, to Pinkerton's activities in the early part of the Civil War in helping to establish the intelligence department. Within a week after the fall of Fort Sumter he offered his services to the President along with the assistance of his associates consisting of about eighteen people. A few days after George B. McClellan was appointed to command the Department of Ohio, the general sent for Pinkerton to come to Cincinnati where a secret service for his department was established. From that time on Pinkerton was to be known professionally as E. J. Allen.

On July 25, 1861, McClellan wrote Pinkerton that he had been called by the President to Washington. Two days later, upon learning that he was to have the command of the Army of the Potomac, he immediately sent for Pinkerton who was placed at the head of the secret service of McClellan's new military unit. Pinkerton's over-estimates of the total numbers of the enemy confronting McClellan have become notorious among students of the Civil War. Kenneth Williams claims that Pinkerton and his associates "turned out to be a great asset to Jefferson Davis" because of the greatly exaggerated reports of confederate strength.

Lincoln once wrote to General Hooker, "I also believe you do not mix politics with your profession in which you are right." This compliment could not have been paid to General McClellan. He assumed that he had two battlefronts to defend, one consisting of political opponents at the north, and the other comprising military enemies at the south. To watch the political front he assigned Pinkerton in person who went to the nation's capital as early as May, 1862 to check the movements of the President, as well as the activities of Stanton, Halleck, Chase, and certain members of Congress. In justice to Pinkerton it must be observed that he was working under the supervision and the official command of his superior, General McClellan, from whom he received his orders. Although Pinkerton was being paid by the United States government he was being directed by General

McClellan to do a piece of work purely personal to the general himself.

On the twenty-second of May Pinkerton reported that on the previous day Lincoln went to the war department as early as 7:00 a.m. and Stanton and Halleck arrived shortly, and guards were provided to keep out all but authorized visitors. The arrival of Burnside at Willard's Hotel, was also noted, followed shortly by the President and Stanton who remained about an hour. Pinkerton also stated that on the 19th Lincoln had visited Fox for a long time and that the President went back again the next morning at six-thirty and remained until nine. An Illinois delegation visited Lincoln with reference to General Pope's status and Pinkerton was able to report to McClellan the conversation which took place at the conference.

Reports also extant were made by Pinkerton to McClellan on Aug. 21, 23, and 25 about the movements of certain men in Washington and especially the activities of the President himself. After Pinkerton detected Lincoln leaving the White House on one of these days, he immediately called on Secretary Nicolay and was able to pump out of him just how Lincoln felt about General McClellan, which information was immediately forwarded to the General. A report also observed that several times each day Lincoln went to Halleck's house or his headquarters.

On September 22 Pinkerton paid a personal visit to the President who said he was glad Pinkerton had called. The President interrogated Pinkerton closely, about the movements of the Army of the Potomac, and Pinkerton forwarded McClellan a 1600 word report of the conversation with the President, including Lincoln's statement about the Army and McClellan personally. In the conclusion of the long letter Pinkerton referring to the President stated, "You know I am rather prejudiced against him" (Lincoln) and then Pinkerton admits he was more impressed with Lincoln's honesty and justice than ever before, after the recent visit.

Many Lincoln students are familiar with the six group pictures made upon Lincoln's visit to the headquarters of the Army of the Potomac. It will be recalled that two of the prints present Lincoln standing between Allan Pinkerton and General McClellan. We believe it is not widely known that Pinkerton joined the small Lincoln Party on its trip back to Washington after the Antietam visit. Immediately upon arrival at Washington Pinkerton wrote McClellan stating that he had "considerable conversation" with Mr. Lincoln on the way and immediately set down in writing for McClellan the President's reaction to the trip and especially his personal comments on the general, himself.

Pinkerton also had a chance, on his return trip, to learn what Secretary Nicolay and Lincoln's friend Ozias M. Hatch believed about the President's feeling toward McClellan which was also made known to his superior. Pinkerton closed this letter by advising the general, "All is bright and beautiful as regards your future prospects." Yet on November 5, 1862 McClellan was relieved of his command. This action caused Pinkerton to immediately resign and recall his associates. If any more evidence were needed to disparage McClellan's attitude towards his commander-in-chief, the fact that he was having President Lincoln stalked by Allan Pinkerton would be sufficient to condemn him.