

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN VISITS THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC

Ninety-one years ago this week, just a few days after the battle of Antietam which occurred on September 17, 1862, Abraham Lincoln visited the Army of the Potomac. He was greatly disappointed that McClellan had not pursued Lee and possibly ended the war at that early date. Apparently he wanted to see for himself the condition of the troops and ascertain if possible what prevented a follow-up action.

George Alfred Townsend, a newspaper reporter well known to Lincoln students, on one occasion interviewed Col. Wright Rives who claimed to have been with the Lincoln party that visited Antietam. He was a member of General McClernand's staff which caused him to accompany the general who was the guest of the President. Rives states that some time after the battle of Antietam Lincoln said to McClernand, "If I could get away from this place I would go up and see the army. Halleck won't let me go. Now if I could keep it a secret I would slip off with you and see my soldiers." Lincoln decided to make the trip and notified McClernand on Sunday, September 30 to be ready to start at six o'clock the next morning "and keep still about it."

The party consisted of Lincoln, General McClernand, Ward H. Lamon, Ozias M. Hatch, all from Illinois, Wright Rives, a member of McClernand's staff and representatives of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, including its president, John W. Garrett. Lamon, Hatch and Rives have left reminiscences of the trip which allow us to present an accurate synopsis of this important visit of the President to the Army of the Potomac.

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 1

Early morning—Presidential party left Washington on special train and went without breakfast because no food available enroute.

Noon—Train reached Harper's Ferry. Presidential party met by Major Kip and Captain Sumner and escorted to Gen. Sumner's headquarters.

Afternoon—General McClellan arrives and with the President reviews the troops at Bolivar Heights.

Night—The President spends the night in a house at Harper's Ferry.

### TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2

Morning—The President and General Sumner review the troops at Loudon Heights and Maryland Heights.

Noon—Party starts for General McClellan's headquarters.

Afternoon—Lincoln arrives at headquarters of Army of Potomac too late to make many observations.

Night—President occupies tent just to the right of McClellan's headquarters.

### WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3

Daybreak—Lincoln aroused Hatch and they walk in silence through rows of tents to a hill top.

Sunrise—The President pointing to the tented city exclaims, "Hatch-Hatch, what is all this." Hatch replied, "Why, Mr. Lincoln, this is the army of the Potomac." The President drew himself up to his full height and said, "No, Hatch, no. This is General McClellan's body guard." This is all that was said and they walked silently back to their tent.

8:00 A.M.—Lincoln sends telegram to Gen. Halleck at Washington about treatment of rebel prisoners under flag of truce. Later in morning receives reply from Halleck.

Morning—President with McClellan reviews General Burnside's corps and the cavalry in vicinity of Antietam battleground.

Sometime during this day a half dozen group pictures were taken showing Lincoln and associates and military personnel.

Midday—Ambulances are used to transport party three miles at which time Lamon sang the "sad song" so widely criticized.\*

Afternoon—Porter's, Reynold's, and then Franklin's Corps at Bakerville were reviewed.

Sometime during the day Lincoln wrote this memorandum, "I would be very glad to oblige Mrs. Disney but I can do no more than I have done, refer her to the Surgeon General."

Evening—The President receives another telegram from Halleck about treatment of rebel prisoners.

Night—Lincoln again occupied tent next to McClellan's headquarters.

### THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4

Morning—Another telegram from Gen. Halleck about treatment of rebel prisoners. The President and McClellan visited the wounded in the vicinity of headquarters. At Sharpsburg the President called on "Fighting Dick" Richardson who lived in a "Pennsylvania-looking farm house." The President was deeply moved as Richardson's injuries were mortal.

Midday—Lincoln and McClellan visited the South-Mountain battleground where the President and McClellan concluded their observations.

Afternoon—Lincoln called at the home of Mrs. Ramsey to visit Brig. Gen. George L. Hartsuff who had been wounded. The President visited both the Union and Confederate hospitals. The only recorded addresses which Lincoln made on the trip were delivered at Frederick, Md. The first one was made at the home of Mrs. Ramsey where he had visited Brigadier General Hartsuff already mentioned. Lincoln's few words follow:

"In my present position it is hardly proper for me to make speeches. Every word is so closely noted that it will not do to make trivial ones, and I cannot be expected to be prepared to make a matured one just now. If I were as I have been most of my life, I might perhaps, talk amusing to you for half an hour, and it wouldn't hurt anybody; but as it is, I can only return my sincere thanks for the compliment paid our cause and our common country."

Just before the departure of his train at the Frederick railroad station he was again urged to make a speech by soldiers and townspeople. His brief remarks are here recorded:

"Fellow-Citizens: I see myself surrounded by soldiers, and a little further off I note the citizens of this good city of Frederick, anxious to hear something from me. I can only say, as I did five minutes ago, it is not proper for me to make speeches in my present position. I return thanks to our soldiers for the good service they have rendered, for the energies they have shown, the hardships they have endured, and the blood they have so nobly shed for this dear Union of ours; and I also return thanks not only to the soldiers, but to the good citizens of Maryland, and to all the good men and women in this land, for their devotion to our glorious cause. I say this without any malice in my heart to those who have done otherwise. May our children and our children's children to a thousand generations, continue to enjoy the benefits conferred upon us by a united country, and have cause yet to rejoice under those glorious institutions bequeathed us by Washington and his compeers. Now, my friends, soldiers and citizens, I can only say once more, farewell."

10:00 P.M.—Special train bearing presidential party arrived in Washington.

\*See Lincoln Lore 230