

My Experiences as a Member of President Lincoln's Bodyguard, 1863-65

By Smith Stimmel

Following a three-month enlistment in Company H, 85th Ohio Volunteer Infantry in 1862, Smith Stimmel (1842 – 1935), then a student at Ohio Wesleyan University, volunteered to reenlist as a member of the Union Light Guard, assigned to protect the president. After President Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, the troop briefly acted as bodyguard to Andrew Johnson, before the men were discharged from the service in time for Stimmel to return to Ohio Wesleyan that fall.

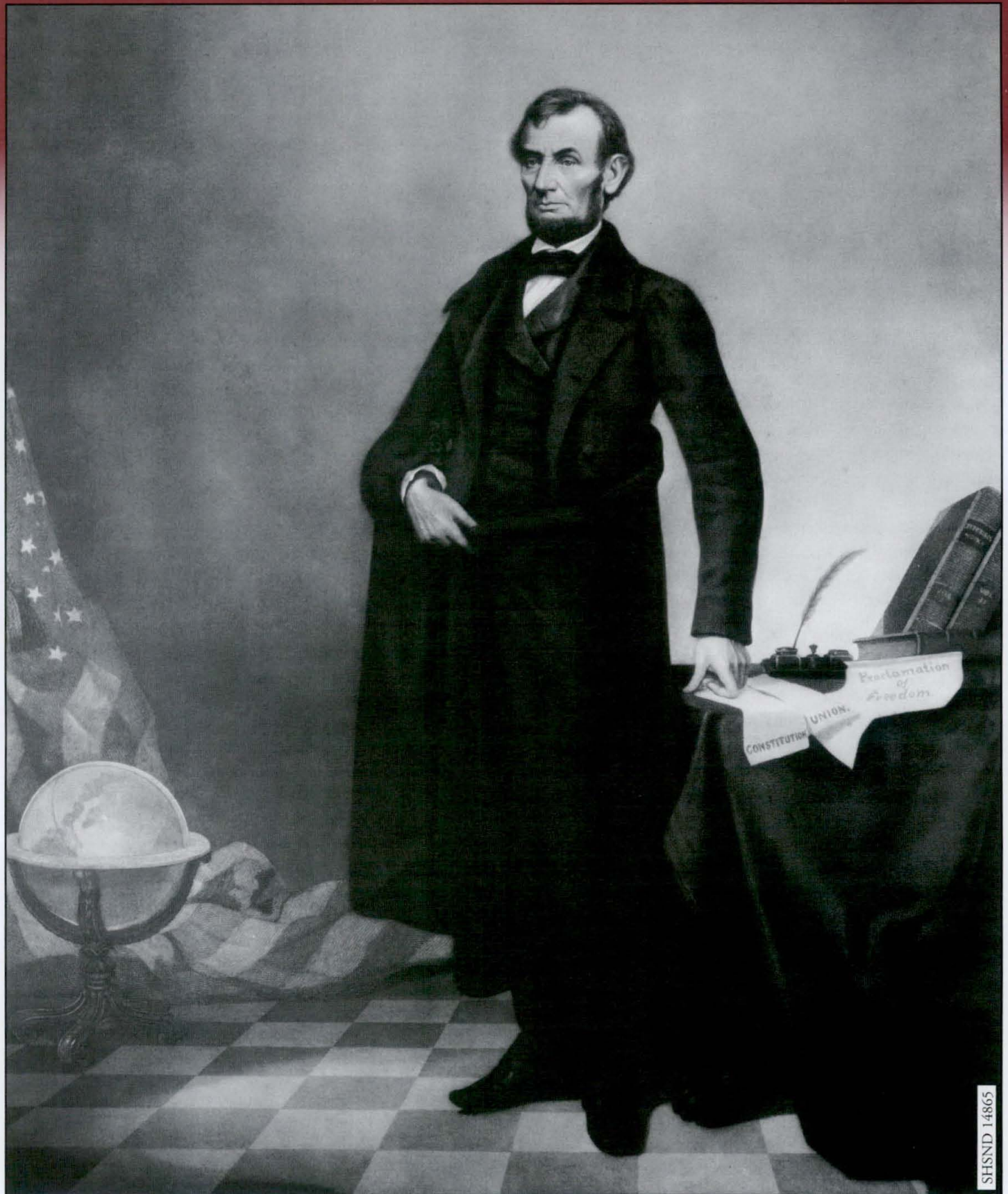
The story of Stimmel's experiences with Abraham Lincoln was retold many times and written down in several versions, including one published in January 1927 in *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* Volume 1, Number 2 (the predecessor to *North Dakota History*). The following has been excerpted from that article.

During the summer of 1863, Governor Tod of Ohio visited Washington concerning the interest of his state in the war, and when he called at the White House he became impressed with the idea that the president was not sufficiently protected. He applied to the War Department for permission to organize a troop of one hundred mounted men to be assigned to duty as President Lincoln's mounted body guard. That permission was given, and in order to give the entire state of Ohio representation in such a troop he sent out a circular letter to the military committees of the counties in the state asking them to send in the name of a man they would recommend "for highly honorable and strictly confidential service," but the letter did not state what that service was to be.

I had already served a three months' term in the army, but at that time was at my home on the farm near Columbus. I was contemplating entering the service again when my attention was called to the governor's letter and I was asked if I was willing to enter that service. I said that if the governor would accept me I was ready to serve. One member of the military committee of our county was a neighbor of ours, and he gave me a letter of recommendation, which I presented to the governor in person, and was accepted. When the organization was completed we were all supplied with black horses and sent to Washington and placed on duty at the White House. Governor Tod named the company the Union Light Guard.

Our duties were to guard the front entrance to the White House grounds, and to act as an escort to the president whenever he went out in his carriage, or when he rode on horseback, as he often did during the summer.

We enjoyed our summer work much more than we did the winter guard duty. During the hot summer months the president lived out at the Soldiers' Home, north of the city, and a little beyond the city limits, on a slightly elevated plat of ground, well shaded by a beautiful grove. There was a modest two-story brick dwelling connected with the Soldiers' Home property, which was set apart for the president's summer quarters. It was a pleasant country place, where the president could get a good night's rest, which he very much needed; but that was about all the comfort he got out of it. Our company furnished him an escort out in the evening, and back to the White House in the morning. We had tents out there in the grove for our sleeping quarters. This part of the service gave us an opportunity to see a good deal of the daily life of the president, as he appeared in his every-day clothes, when he could relax a little. Often during the early part of the evening, after he had had his supper, he would take a stroll down along the edge of the grove where our tents were pitched, and have a little chat with the lieutenant in command. Sometimes he would look into the men's tents and have a passing word with them, or ask them if they were comfortably fixed. We always felt that the president took a personal interest in us. He never



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This heroic portrait of Abraham Lincoln by Thomas Hicks shows the statesman in a classic pose, holding his cape as a Roman would his toga. Painted about 1865, the image features volumes of "*Jefferson's Works*," and three pieces of paper reading "Constitution," "Union," and "Proclamation of Freedom," as well as a globe and an American flag.

spoke absentmindedly, but talked to his men as if he were thinking of them.

President Lincoln was very tall, standing about six feet four inches in his stocking feet. He was spare of flesh, with large bones and strong frame, dark complexion, big hands and feet, (it took a good deal of leather to make him a pair of boots). He had a large, expressive mouth, a well-formed nose, prominent cheekbones, and black, coarse hair. His eyes were of a bluish grey, rather deeply sunk and of sad expression when in repose, but when animated by something of special interest they would light up with a good deal of brilliancy.

President Lincoln was not very careful about the style and fit of his every-day clothes, and his every-day suit was evidently not made to order, for his arms always seemed too long for his coat sleeves, and his legs too long for his trousers. His summer coat was usually a cheap, black alpaca, which hung quite loosely upon him, and was probably not expensive. He wore an old-fashioned stovepipe silk hat which showed that it had seen considerable service. It had several dents in it and the fur or nap was usually rubbed the wrong way.

I often wondered why the fur on the president's hat was generally so mussed up, and finally I had an opportunity to see what caused it, at least in part. One evening when we were going with the president out to his summer home we met an army officer on horseback, in full dress uniform, bright and new, with a sash and shining belt and a well adjusted military hat with a bright gold cord on it. His horse was rigged out with all the trappings belonging to an officer of rank, fully in keeping with the rider. As he approached us, he recognized the man in the carriage as the president, and raised his hat with all the grace and dignity of a trained military man. The president was busy looking over some papers as he rode along, and did not notice that he was being saluted by an officer until he was almost past, when he glanced up and saw the lifted hat. He immediately threw up his long arm and knocked off his tall hat, and then tumbled it back on his head and brought his big hand down on the crown to press it firmly in place. That was his return salute. I don't wish to give the impression that President Lincoln always saluted in this way. That was merely a hurry-up salute. It was his business to get his hat off quickly, and the quickest way he could do it was to knock it off.

Later I had occasion to find out that the president could give a graceful salute when occasion demanded it. My mount was a handsome, black mare, but one of the most vicious animals I ever saw handled. One morning we were coming in with the president from his summer home; just as we left the home grounds and turned into the street leading into the city, she began one of her tantrums. Suddenly,



Courtesy of LeRoy Fladseth

Union Light Guard Sergeant Smith Stimmel poses on his horse Star, in Washington, D.C., in 1865.

she lunged forward and started down the street on a dead run. She fairly flew past the president's carriage though I was doing my best to check her. The large army bridle we used was severe enough to almost break a horse's jaw, and although I made the blood run from her mouth in a stream, it seemed to make no impression on her. I was afraid as we got down the street where there were more vehicles and pedestrians that she would run into a carriage or possibly kill someone. For a moment I thought I would have to pull my revolver and shoot her in the back of the head.

There was a double track of old-fashioned flatcar rails on the street, such as were in use in those days of horse-cars. She suddenly took a diagonal course across the street and, those flat rails being wet and slippery, slipped on the car rails and, after an awkward slide, came to the ground with a crash. I stayed in the saddle with both of my feet touching the ground, and she lay on her side only long enough to catch her breath, and then she jumped up, taking me with her. She gave her head an angry shake, but her tantrum was over. I rode back to join the escort. As I approached the president's carriage, I saluted him, as was our usual custom,

and in return he lifted his hat in the most exquisite manner and bowed with a gracious smile. That was how I came to know that the president could give a graceful salute if he felt so inclined. Of course I understand that the salute was given somewhat as a fatherly pat on the back, as much as to say, "Young man, I am glad to see you come out all right in that fracas," for he had seen my mare in a tantrum before.

An amusing incident occurred out at the Soldiers' Home one evening, which we used to tell our friends and we always called it the Pig Tail Story. Our duties, of course, were principally guard duties, and if there is any one thing that becomes more irksome than another to the average soldier it is continuous guard duty. Under it the soldiers are liable to become restless, and sometimes fractious, especially when there are stirring events going on at the front. There came a time during the early summer of 1864 when the men of our company became very restless. There were reports of great activity at the front, and we longed to be in it. So, one evening when the president was strolling near the men's tents, emboldened by his kindly manner, one of the men took it upon himself to approach him in regard to the matter of a change of service. He explained that the men felt they were not needed where they were, and that there was greater need of their services at the front. The president listened patiently to all the man had to say, and then, with a twinkle in his eye, he said, "Well, my boy, that reminds me of an old farmer friend of mine in Illinois, who used to say he never could understand why the Lord put the curl in a pig's tail. It did not seem to him to be either useful or ornamental, but he guessed the Lord knew what he was doing when he put it there. I do not myself," he said, "see the necessity of having soldiers traipsing around after me wherever I go, but Stanton," referring to the secretary of war, "who knows a great deal more about such things than I do, seems to think it necessary, and he may well be right. And if it is necessary to have soldiers here it might as well be you as someone else. If you were sent to the front, someone would have to come from the front to take your place." Then in a tone of mild rebuke he added, "It is a soldier's duty to obey orders without question, and in doing that you can serve your country as faithfully here as at the front, and," said he, with another smile, "I reckon it is not quite as dangerous here as it is there." So with a gentle wave of his hand he passed on. The other boys had the laugh on their comrade's unsuccessful effort to get to the front, but no other member of that company ever ventured to carry any further

complaint to the president about their service.

President Lincoln was as indifferent about the appearance of his livery outfit as he was about his clothes. The carriage he used for everyday purposes was about on a par with the average street hack, and his team would be called common plugs anywhere; but he had a fairly respectable barouche that was used on state occasions. He did not possess a saddle horse of his own, and when he wished to go out on horseback as he sometimes did, he would send word to our quarters for us to bring him a saddle horse when we went on duty. Then we would rig up one of our company horses for his use. This horse, known as Abe, was a long legged, high headed animal, fairly well gaited and not ill suited to the president's equestrian figure. Our greatest difficulty was in getting stirrup-straps adjusted for the president. He would let them out to the end hole, and then he would have to curl up his legs to get his feet into the stirrups. When he mounted that horse, with his tall hat extending high in the air, he was indeed an interesting figure. We enjoyed seeing



Located three miles north of downtown Washington, D.C., the Soldier's Home was the summer residence of the Lincoln family from 1862 to 1864. It was founded as a home for retired or disabled veterans and included this cottage, which was used as the summer White House by presidents Buchanan, Lincoln, Hayes, and Arthur. Recently restored and opened to the public, the home still stands on the grounds of the Armed Forces Retirement Home.

Library of Congress LOT13634, no. 16

him on his "high horse," as we used to call it.

President Lincoln seemed to be absolutely devoid of anything like self-consciousness or pride in his position as president of the United States. There is no doubt that he fully realized the responsibility attached to his high office, but his profound sense of duty overshadowed everything else. Anyone who has ever been much in the presence of men of high rank know how common it is for them to assume an air of official importance, very often in inverse ratio to the rank actually held. While I never saw President Lincoln belittle the dignity of his office, there was no official austerity about him. This was manifest both in the discharge of his official duties and in the little everyday incidents.

For instance, one morning when the president was coming in from his summer home on horseback, he and the lieutenant in command of the escort were riding side by side, the escort following in the rear. Between the grounds of the Soldiers' Home and the built-up portion of the city there was a tract of unoccupied land, the city common, on which some cows were grazing. Suddenly the president and the lieutenant turned their horses and went cantering over to where these cows were, and of course we followed them. The president rode in among the cows and pointing to one of them with his long bony finger said, "You see, just as I told you." I was unable to catch what it was that he wanted the lieutenant to notice, but the lieutenant said, "Yes, I see you are right." Having convinced the lieutenant of the correctness of his statement, he wheeled and started off on a canter for the White House. When we had left the president at the White House and gone to our quarters, I said to the lieutenant, "What was the occasion for the cow inspection on the way out this morning?" He laughed and said, "As we were coming along the conversation turned upon the peculiar construction of a cow, and the president remarked that the cow is a lopsided animal, that is, one side is higher than the other. When the president saw those cows feeding over on the commons, he said, 'We will just go over to those cows yonder and I will show you that I am right about that.'"

At the time I thought how strange it was that the president of the United States, with a gigantic war on his hands, a man who during the day would be receiving and sending dispatches concerning the movements of the army and navy, and would be in consultation with cabinet officials and military officers of high rank, should have his attention diverted to the lopsided structure of a cow, and would take the trouble to convince an insignificant lieutenant that one side of a cow was higher than the other. But in later years I came to recognize that very common-place element in his makeup as a mark of his greatness. Under the strain and burden of his official life during those strenuous times, he absolutely needed some real diversion. He knew himself well

enough to make use of such opportunities as his mornings and evenings afforded him and enjoy these little diversions however trifling they might be as a welcome relief from the stress and burden of official duties.

Another incident illustrating his self-forgetfulness and his very human interest in everyday affairs was the burning of the White House stables. One evening between 10 and 11 o'clock, in the month of February, 1864, while on duty at the front door of the White House, I heard an alarm of fire. I looked around in different directions to see if I could see any indication of fire in that vicinity. In a moment or two I saw a flicker of light around to the east and south end of the building. It seemed to come from somewhere between the south end of the Treasury Building and the White House, where the stable was located at that time.

I debated a moment whether or not I ought to go and render some assistance. There was nothing in my instructions that forbade my doing so if I thought best, but about the time I located the fire, I heard the fire department coming, and I concluded they could fight a fire better than I could and that I had better stay where I was. Just then the front door of the White House flew open with a jerk, and out came the president, buttoning his coat around him. He said to me, "Where is the fire, what's burning?" I said, "It seems to be around in the vicinity of the stable." With that he started off on a dog trot down the steps and along the way leading to the stable. And I followed him on the double quick, finding it difficult to keep close to him with his long strides that kept me on the dead run. As soon as we got around where we could see what was burning, we found that the White House stable was on fire.

Quite a crowd had gathered by the time we got there and the fire department was at work. The president asked hastily if the horses had been taken out and when told they had not, he rushed through the crowd and began to break open one of the large doors with his own hands, but the building was full of fire on the inside and none of the horses could be saved. The ponies belonging to the little boys, and the goats were all lost in the fire. It was a brick stable and evidently had been burning for some time before it was discovered.

The captain and some of the men from our company, quartered a little way south of that point, appeared on the scene, and with the captain was a dignified gentleman whom I did not know. Seeing the president in the crowd, they stepped up to him and I heard the strange gentleman say, "Mr. President, this is no place for you," and slipping his arm through the president's arm, he walked back with him to the White House. I accompanied them back and took my place at the front door.

The president seemed much grieved on account of the fire for some reason, and later we found out that it was on account of the loss of one of the ponies that had belonged



This 1866 engraving of the Lincoln family shows Tad, President Lincoln, Robert, and Mary Lincoln in the White House. In the background is a framed portrait of Willie Lincoln, who had died in 1862, and a marble bust of George Washington, with the U.S. Capitol in view out the window. Stimmel remembered how Lincoln grieved over the death of a pony that had belonged to Willie.

to his son Willie, who had died at the White House a short time before. The loss of the pony brought back anew the sorrow he had experienced in the death of his little son, and I was told he even wept when the loss of Willie's favorite pony was reported to him. No man was ever more devoted to his family than was President Lincoln.

In the discharge of his official duties Mr. Lincoln displayed much the same plain and simple characteristics as he did in the common everyday walks of life. He was laborious and painstaking, giving careful attention to minor details. He usually returned late at night and always rose early in the morning. At times when there was considerable activity at the front, it was a common thing to see him going alone from the White House to the War Department late at night, sometimes as late as midnight, and again early the next morning.

The only battle President Lincoln saw during the war was a little fight that took place at Fort Stevens, one of the defenses of Washington, on the afternoon of the twelfth day of July, 1864. During the early part of July General Jubal Early made a raid into Maryland with about 20,000 men. At first it appeared as though he intended to attack Baltimore, but he suddenly turned toward Washington, and on the eleventh of July he was immediately in front of Fort

Stevens, about six or eight miles north of the city. It was an anxious day for the president and for all who knew the situation.

Meanwhile, Grant had sent the sixth army corps and part of the nineteenth from Fortress Monroe, in all about 6,000 men, under General Wright, on transports up the Potomac River to the relief of Washington. A small portion of these reinforcements reached Washington the evening before, but the main body did not arrive until the morning of the twelfth. The president went down to the wharf to meet them in the morning to cheer them by his presence. As soon as they could be disembarked and given something to eat, they marched out to the scene of action. There was a general

feeling that there would be a fight in the vicinity of Fort Stevens that day.

Immediately after dinner, we were ordered to go with the president. We did not know where he was going, but we felt pretty certain he was going out to see the fight, and we were very glad to go with him. Sure enough, he made for Fort Stevens about as fast as the old coach could take him, and arrived before the whole of the sixth corps got there. On arriving at the fort, the president left his carriage and took his position behind the earth works.

The fight commenced about half past four o'clock in the afternoon, and kept up until almost sundown. As the sun was sinking in the west the Confederates ceased firing and beat a retreat. Our bugle sounded, and we made ready to escort the president back to the city. As compared with the great battles of the war, the battle of Fort Stevens was a small affair, but it was a very important one, as it doubtless saved the city of Washington from a dangerous attack.

There were those who, during his administration, looked upon Lincoln's kind and sympathetic nature as a weakness, but Lincoln was no weakling. In matters needing sympathy he was as kind and gentle as a loving mother, but in matters of state, involving principles of right, he was as firm and immovable as the everlasting hills.

A soldier in Butler's army had been tried and condemned to be shot. His mother came and pleaded for his pardon. She told the president how he had been a good boy at home, always faithful and helpful to her; that she could easily give him up to die in battle, fighting for his country, if need be, but to have him shot down like a dog for what seemed to be some dereliction of duty was more than she could bear. She pleaded the extenuating circumstances and asked for the pardon of her son, pledging her word that if her boy was restored to duty, no one would again have occasion to prefer a charge against him.

General Butler, knowing the president had already pardoned a number of men, wrote to the president not to interfere in this case, as his clemency was already destroying the discipline of the army. But Lincoln knew that in the sudden call of a large volunteer army of men who came from the homes, the farms and the counting houses, many well-meaning boys, not accustomed to the rigor of military rule, were liable to fall short of some of the requirements of military discipline. As he listened to that mother's plea he decided that the soldier who had such a mother was worth saving. At the end of his interview he said, "By jing! Butler or no Butler, here goes!" and he wrote an order for the boy's pardon.

I gave this talk at Delaware, Ohio, in December, 1907, and at the conclusion among others a middle aged lady came up to shake hands with me. Her eyes were brimming with tears; with trembling lips she said, "He signed an order that saved my father from being shot."

He was equally wise and sagacious in regard to the question of the abolition of slavery. During the early part of the war, there were those who clamored for the abolition of slavery almost on the outbreak of the war, before the time was ripe for it, and while there still existed a strong prejudice against abolition in the North. While Lincoln was in favor of the abolition of slavery, he knew it was not a matter to push forward in advance of public opinion.

It was my privilege to sit on my little black mare a few yards from President Lincoln when he delivered his second inaugural address. The clear, decisive and forceful statements contained in that memorable document, tempered as they are with generous charity, are a true index of his strong and determined, yet generous character.

The morning of the day of his second inauguration was



The crowd gathers, awaiting President Lincoln's second inauguration in 1865. This photo shows soldiers, some of whom are African-Americans participating in the inaugural parade for the first time.

rainy, dark and drizzly, but a few moments before he was to deliver his address, the mist and the clouds cleared away and the sun shone out bright and warm. Several thousands had gathered in front of the large platform erected for the occasion at the east front of the Capitol to hear the president's inaugural address. The dark and doubtful periods of the war had passed, and the president had gained the perfect confidence of all loyal people, North and South. They had come to recognize the justice and wisdom of many of his acts for which he had been severely criticized. The prejudice which had existed in the minds of many against the emancipation of slaves during the early part of the war had passed away and the people had settled down to the conviction that the conflict was a fight to the finish, and they were ready to stand by the president to the end. They anticipated that the president would voice this sentiment in his inaugural address, and they were eagerly waiting to hear this expression of his purpose.

At the appointed hour, the president, accompanied by Chief Justice Chase and a large committee of dignitaries, came down the Capitol steps to the speaker's stand. After the thunderous applause that greeted his appearance had subsided to almost breathless silence, the president began his short and incisive address. His clear, strong tenor voice rang over that vast assemblage, so clearly that he could be heard distinctly to the outer limits of the crowd. I shall never

forget the profound impression made by that part of his address wherein he referred to the continuation of the war, in which he said:

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled up by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

A suppressed feeling of satisfaction seemed to sweep over that vast audience. I could see men all around me exchanging side glances and approving nods, and I heard in suppressed tones such expressions as: "That's the stuff! That's the stuff!" And when like a benediction he uttered that last paragraph of his speech, beginning: "With malice toward none, with charity for all," the cheers of the people seemed to rise to the very sky.

You have doubtless all read of the bright star that was reported as seen about noon on the day of Lincoln's second inauguration. Soon after the president concluded his address, he entered his carriage and the procession started up Pennsylvania Avenue toward the White House, the escort from our company following next to his carriage. Shortly after we turned on to Pennsylvania Avenue, west of the Capitol, I noticed the crowd along the street looking intently, and some were pointing to something in the heavens, toward the south. I glanced up in that direction, and there in plain view, shining out in all her beauty, was the planet Venus. It was a little after midday at the time I saw it, possibly near one o'clock; the sun seemed to be a little west of the meridian, the planet a little east. The superstitious had many strange notions about it, but of course it was simply owing to the peculiarly clear condition of the atmosphere and the favorable position of the planet at that time. The president and those who were with him in the carriage noticed the star at the same time.

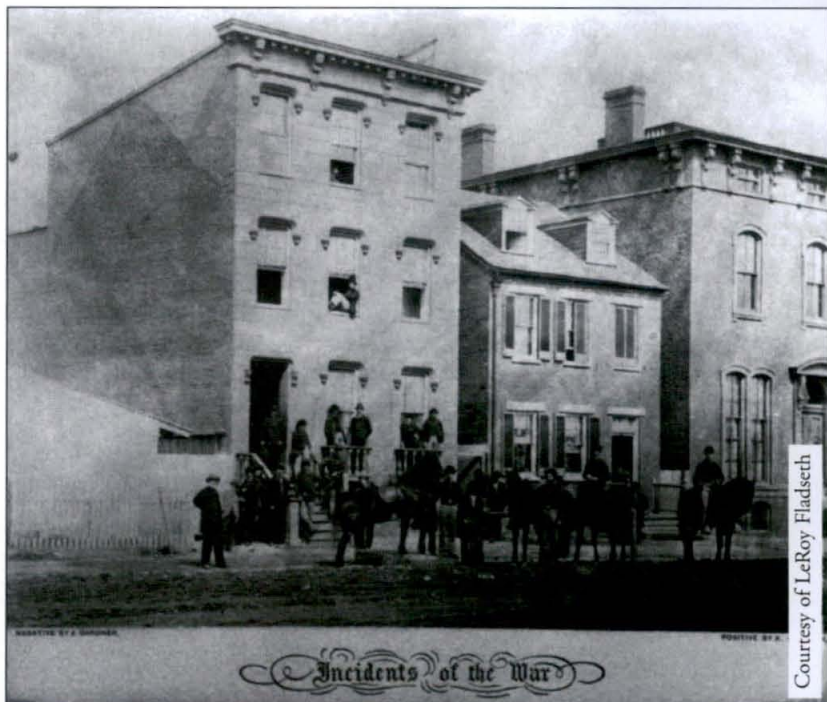
The rapid movements of our armies and the unity of their action in the spring campaign of 1865 brought the war to a speedy close. On the fourth of April, just one month from the day he delivered his famous inaugural address, Lincoln had the privilege of entering Richmond, the Confederate capital. Five days later Lee surrendered to Grant. It was on Sunday just after the president had returned to Washington from his visit to the front that he received a message announcing Lee's surrender, but this intelligence was not made known to the public until the next morning.

On Monday morning, the tenth of April, I was standing in front of General Hancock's headquarters when I heard a band playing and loud cheering down in the neighborhood of the War Department. As I listened the cheering became louder and it seemed to me as though there were two or three bands playing at once, and each one playing a different air. I started down the street briskly to see what it all meant.

On the way I met an elderly man, and as I came up to him he began swinging his cane and shouting, "Hurrah for the Union!" "So say I," I said, "but what is all this racket about?" "Haven't you heard the news?" said he. "No," said I, "nothing since the fall of Richmond." "Why," said he, "Lee has surrendered! The war is over! The Union is saved, and slavery has gone forever from this fair land!"

A large crowd had congregated in front of the War Department, and Secretaries Stanton and Seward and Vice President Andrew Johnson and other members of the cabinet were there making little congratulatory speeches, interspersed with national airs by the band. It was amusing to see those dignitaries that morning. For once they forgot to be dignified and played like boys.

Someone in the crowd shouted, "Now for the White House!" and led by the band, the crowd made a rush in that direction, and called for the president. He appeared at an upper window west of the portico. His appearance was the signal for wild and enthusiastic cheering and cries of "Speech! Speech!" He raised his hand and all became quiet. He said, "My friends, you call for a speech, but I cannot make a speech at this time; undue importance might be



Union soldiers stand in front of General Winfield Scott Hancock's headquarters in Washington, D.C. in 1865. Smith Stimmel is at the far right, on horseback.

given to what I would say. I must take time to think. If you will come here tomorrow evening I will have something to say to you." The president said, "You have a band with you, and there is one piece of music I have always liked which heretofore has not seemed proper to make use of in the North, but now by virtue of my prerogative as president of the United States and commander in chief of the army and navy, I declare it contraband of war and our lawful prize: I ask the band to play "Dixie." And again the crowd went wild and the band struck up "Dixie" with all the wind power it had.

The next evening a large crowd gathered in front of the White House to hear the president's promised speech, and it was my privilege to be with them. That evening he appeared at an upper window east of the portico, a place where he had often appeared during the war to greet military organizations with words of cheer when they called at the White House. The speech delivered by the president was read from manuscript, and has become part of our history. It was his last public utterance, and I prize it as a precious memory that I heard it as it fell from his lips.

The grand illumination on the night of the thirteenth concluded the three or four days and nights of celebrating the great victory, and everybody seemed to feel like taking a rest and beginning to think soberly. I know I did. What I wanted more than anything else was a good night's sleep, for the last few days and nights had been noisy and almost sleepless ones.

The fourteenth day of April was warm, calm and beautiful, an ideal spring day. All nature seemed to bask in the warm sunlight of assured peace, and the general public had settled down to dream of a glorious future for our reunited country.

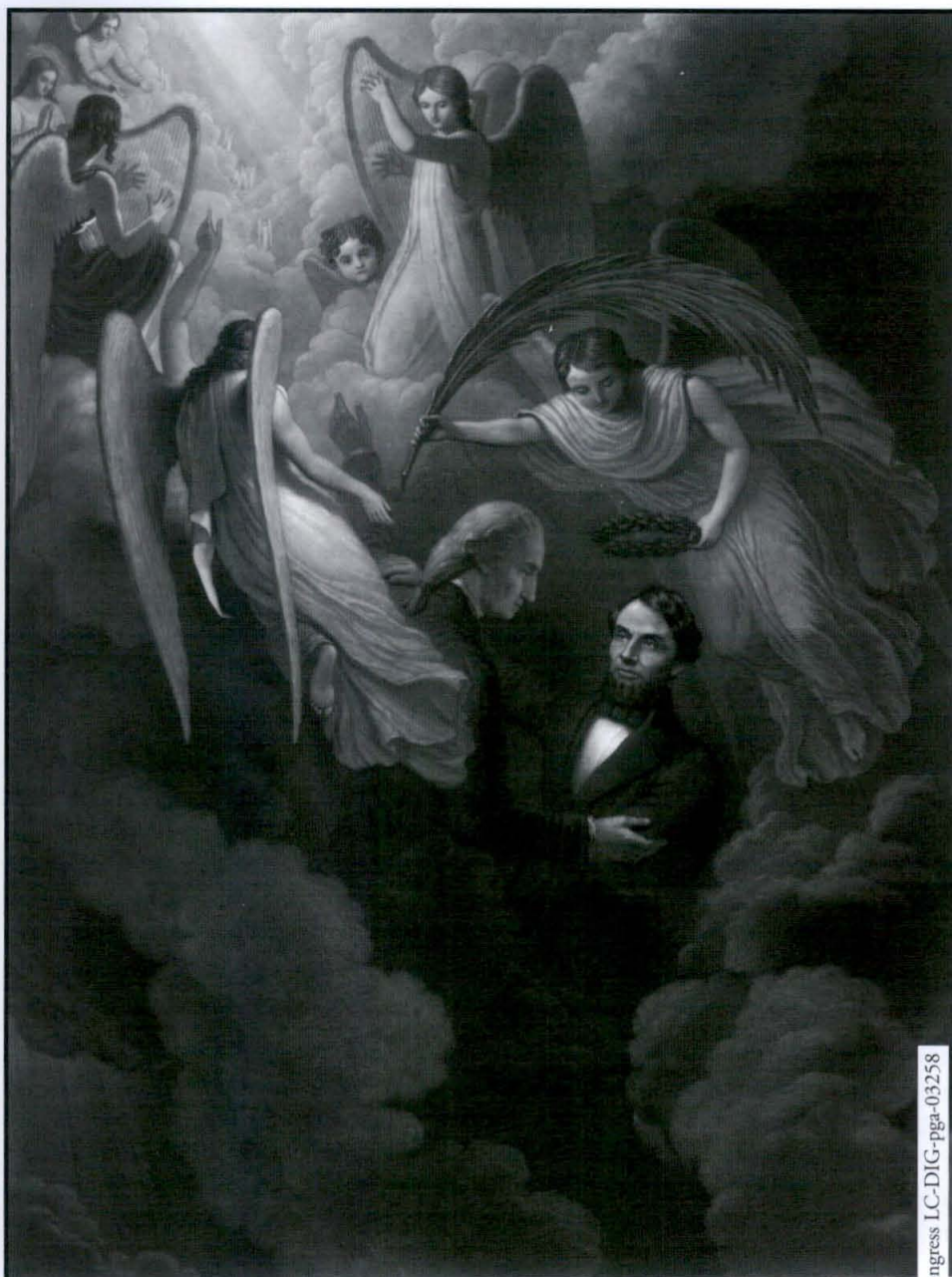
We of the guard retired reasonably early that night, for we were all tired, and it seemed to me that I had just gotten into a sound sleep, when I thought I heard someone calling my name from the outside of the building. I turned my



This 1865 allegorical print, "The End of the Rebellion in the United States," depicts the downfall of the Confederacy. Liberty and Columbia/Freedom stand on a pedestal, with images of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln carved into the base. Justice leads the Union, and an African-American soldier is in the foreground, opposite a slave with broken shackles.

head and listened and again I heard someone call, "Sergeant Stimmell!" I jumped up and put my head out of the window, for our sleeping apartment was on the second story of the building, and asked what was wanted. The man who called said hastily, "Lincoln and Seward have been killed." Then he turned and went off down the street as fast as he could run. I recognized his voice and knew it was one of the men from our company.

If I had been struck a stunning blow in the face I could not have been more dazed than I was for a moment on receiving that announcement. The other men were partly aroused by hearing me speak to someone outside, and inquired what was the matter. I said, "McClellan says," that was the name of the man who brought the word, "that Lincoln and Seward have been killed. Get up boys, quickly; we may be needed." Everyone jumped into his clothes and buckled on his equipment, and we went down to the stable and saddled our horses in less time, it seemed to me, than it takes to tell it. As we saddled our horses not much was said by anyone; it was too horrible to talk about. As we rode out on the avenue the men said to me, "You lead off, and wherever you go we will follow." Our thought at the first was that there was a riot in the city, instigated by a revengeful spirit of the defeated enemy. The anger of those men was so intense on hearing that the president had been killed, possibly as the work of a mob, that it would have



ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE MARTYR,
VICTORIOUS.

Library of Congress LC-DIG-pga-03258

"Abraham Lincoln, the martyr, victorious" is welcomed into heaven by George Washington and a host of angels. Lincoln is crowned with a laurel wreath and handed a palm branch, both symbolic of his success in ending the war. Stimmel describes Lincoln as "one of Earth's grandest heroes, one of her noblest martyrs."

been a relief to them to have plunged directly into a fight.

We rode at full speed to the White House, but all was quiet there. We then started around to our company quarters, and as we were passing down the avenue in front of the Treasury building, a policeman hailed us. He knew that we belonged to the president's escort and he told us that the president had been shot at Ford's Theater, and that

our company had gone there. We hastened to the place and found that the street was blocked with a great crowd. We found our company and soon after our arrival we were ordered to clear the street for one block in front of the house where the president lay. It will be remembered that the president was taken to a private dwelling immediately across the street opposite the theater. Having cleared the streets, we remained there on guard the balance of the night, admitting only those whom we knew had to do with the care of the president.

It was an awful night. To be awakened out of a sound sleep and to be brought face to face with a tragedy so shocking made it hard for me to realize that it could be true. All night I rode slowly up and down the street in front of that house. Sometimes it seemed to me like an awful nightmare, and that I must be dreaming; sometimes I would pinch myself and wonder if I was really awake and on duty, so hard was it for me to realize the fact that President Lincoln was lying in that house in a dying condition.

We were relieved about seven o'clock the next morning, and it was not until after I had had breakfast and a few hours of sleep that I was able to fully realize the awful act. The president died at 7:20 o'clock that morning.

I am frequently asked, "Where was Lincoln's bodyguard the night of the assassination, and how did it happen that they let him be shot?" President Lincoln flatly refused to have a military guard with him when he went to places of entertainment

or to church in the city. He said that when he went to such places he wanted to go as free and unencumbered as other people, and there was no military guard with him the night of his assassination.

This is something of the Lincoln I knew. I wish I could bring him before you as I saw him: a tall, rugged, kindly, homely, lonely man. Often I have seen him, walking alone

in his characteristic manner, with his hands clasped behind his back, his shoulders slightly bent, and on his face a look so sad that one's eyes filled as he looked at him. The words of the prophet would sometimes come into my mind, "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." [Isaiah 53:3] At times he seemed to be weighed down as with a heavy load for the nation's burden was his burden. When a battle was reported, even though it was a victory, the sorrow which attended it, the widow's wail and the orphan's cry found an echo in his soul and seemed to almost crush him. But never did I see him so full of grief, or so occupied with his own affairs, that he was not ready to sympathize with all who needed him, especially if a child called for help. I think he never passed a child without a smile, and somehow, in spite of his sad eyes and heavy brows, the children always took to him. One morning when the president came over from the War Department, some little school children were playing on the front steps of the White House. He stopped and had a pleasant word with them and he even took one or two of their books and glanced through them, and while he did so the children crowded close around him as if he were their own father.

But the president was not a gloomy man. He was always hopeful, and the wit and humor which held his audience spellbound in the old days of the Douglas debates stayed with him. He always had a story suited to the occasion, and there was not a man in our troop who did not have a hatful of anecdotes to tell of their great commander.

To me it was much to have lived for nearly two years in close touch with a man like Lincoln. I was barely twenty when I entered the service, but to the end of my life I shall be grateful for the Providence which gave me such glimpses of one of earth's grandest heroes, one of her noblest martyrs, one of the finest specimens of manhood which God has ever produced: Abraham Lincoln, patriot, statesman, gentleman.



Courtesy of LeRoy Fladseth

Over the years, Smith Stimmel spoke publicly of his times with Lincoln. Here, he explains his connections to Lincoln at the unveiling of the Lincoln bust given by the people of North Dakota to the people of Norway on July 4, 1914, in Kristiania (Oslo).

After the war, Stimmel finished his education and began practicing law in Ohio. He moved his practice to Fargo, Dakota Territory, in 1882, became a member of the territorial legislature from Cass County in 1888, and was elected president of the last legislature before North Dakota became a state in 1889. Stimmel was often called upon to speak publicly about his experiences with President Lincoln, and in 1914 he was a member of a North Dakota delegation to Norway. On July 4th, the North Dakotans presented the Kingdom of Norway with a bust of Abraham Lincoln, and Stimmel again spoke of his connection to Lincoln. Stimmel died on April 19, 1935, in Fargo, North Dakota, seventy years to the day after Lincoln was shot.

