

ANNUAL VISIT WITH LINCOLN

Mr. Lincoln, this is my annual occasion to visit with you. I brought out the flags, the State Flag and the Flag of our country. It is good to visit with you. I should do it oftener. Somehow you seem to restore perspective and you make it possible to separate the wheat from the chaff and emphasize the important things as against the unimportant things. But just visiting with you particularly in feverish times is a rather refreshing experience indeed.

You see we are at war again. It's nearly a hundred, well it is a hundred, years ago that you piloted the country through a war period. That was a sad period indeed. But because of your faith and your persistence the Union was saved and how grateful all those who came after are to you because that's the great legacy that you left for us.

But isn't it rather strange that today men are killing each other again -- in many corners of the world not merely out in Vietnam but elsewhere. Somehow it's the old story of greed and of selfishness and then the idea of forcing ideas on somebody else. You look at the Vietnam picture, it's not a case of conquering territory, who wants that territory, no it's a case of conquering the minds of people and trying to force them to accept a form of government and a belief that they will just not accept. And so that is an old story that goes back centuries and centuries.

You sometimes wonder whether this issue of freedom will ever be resolved. See that our problem out there. The French were there for about 100 years in Vietnam and they took off the cream so to speak. I've been out there and I saw what this Paris of the Orient was really like -- beautiful place -- but of course they didn't do right by those people and at long last there was rebellion and it's about 14 years ago that those very humble people humiliated the French and defeated them. I was in the north part of Vietnam when all this happened. That was back in 1953 and then they had a truce and an accord, they

all went over to Switzerland, to Geneva, and there they signed the usual parchments. So the little country of Laos got its independence and the country of Cambodia got its independence and then IndoChina was cut half into at the 17th Parallel. So what lies north is North Vietnam and what lies south is South Vietnam. But the ink at that convention was scarcely dry before the North Vietnamese moved in and wanted to subjugate the people of South Vietnam. They wanted to dominate them and that left the issue of independence and freedom and self-determination.

Well we have promised them if ever they raised the Macedonian cry and asked for help, we would help them and so we are there. I presume at the time nobody ever expected that we would have 400,000 Americans over there and all the gear, the weapons and the equipment. But there it is and so once more there is this issue of freedom and will it ever be resolved?

You remind me now also of another thing and that is the conduct of war. When you were still here, you had that problem. The Congress, you'll remember, set up a committee on the conduct of the war. I've thought about it a good many times. I can well imagine if there were such a committee. The various members had favorite Generals in mind that they wanted to advance right up to the front, when they wanted to have in some king-size place. You didn't pay much attention to them, in fact you sort of ignored the committee. How fortunate that you did. The outcome of the war might have been different if you hadn't, but we have a bit of that today. The Senate, they have what they call the doves and hawks. The hawks supposedly want to prosecute the war with vigor. The doves don't want to escalate the war, they want to stop the bombing, they want to soften up on the matter believing that that is the way to bring this to an end, to find peace through the negotiation table. So you had the problem of people who wanted to run the war for you.

It comes particularly to mind now because there were 2,000 ministers in Washington last week. I had a contingent of about 250. I spent little time with them. Everybody had his own idea and it seems most of them had ideas quite contrary to mine. So we had quite a discussion about it in the conference room here in the Capitol. Rather singular I must say.

but then you had that problem too where there was division among the people. I'm sure you will recall the time when those ministers came to protest that General Grant was drinking too much whisky and you puzzled for a moment and I remember what you said. You said, if you knew what the brand was you'd buy some for your other Generals. I thought that was a very classic remark. So you had some division among people and we have division here. But I suppose we'll live through it all right. In fact I'm sure that we will.

Now one other thing comes to mind and that is that they're forever coming on with new approaches in order to achieve a peace. Oh, the front page is full of it from time to time and I suppose most of it is rumor, it's bound to be. But you had that problem too. I remember, at least according to the book, that your party and mine was so anxious about the election in 1864. We wanted to be sure that you would be re-elected for a second term and they thought they detected among the people a good deal of hostility toward you. That was probably true. Maybe if they had the things like we have today, the Gallup Poll, that in war time you may not have been so popular. But that didn't make any difference whether you were or weren't didn't bother you so far as your adherence to principle was concerned because you had a man like Horace Greeley to contend with who thought you ought to get about the business of liberating the slaves, making that the primary issue instead of the salvation of freedom and there was your very classic response to Horace Greeley when you said "my primary or first duty is to save the Union." And when Greeley read your reply history records that he said you were just too much for him. How fortunate that you were too much for that great editor in New York who commanded such a great audience and who wrote that prayer, the prayer of the 20 millions which was designed to influence your judgement, but you stood firm and because you did stand firm we are the legatees of your ~~unwavering~~ blessed persistence and today we have one country and not two.

But thinking of these approaches to peace I think it's correct, isn't it, that you went aboard that vessel when they brought the Confederate commissioners through the line and they were going to bargain for a truce, bring the war to an end, and you made it so very simple for them? Well, let me change that a little, you made it so very simple but you made it so hard for them too, because you simply said, the Union must be preserved, and number two slavery must be abolished. You didn't have to write a book about it, just two very short, simple propositions that you could write at the top of a sheet of paper. That wasn't what they came for. They came for a bargain. You had no bargains. How glad we are that you didn't bargain because today there is one country and not two.

I sometimes wonder now, Mr. Lincoln, because some day this matter in Vietnam has got to come to an end. We can win and perhaps we should win, but of course there are those who say you mustn't win, you mustn't take a dominate position, let's somehow bargain it out. Perhaps we can I'm not sure, but what interests me is who is going to be at the bargaining table. Is this national liberation front going to be there? That's the name of the Viet Cong or will only the representatives of the North Vietnamese government from Hanoi be there and from South Vietnam, and of course we'll be there and that should be all.

It doesn't take any more, but they may want to force the Viet Cong around that table and then what, will then finally hope go glimmering and is it possible that when we have contrived an arrangement it will not be durable and probably just as transient as a gentle afternoon breeze, oh I hope not. How many lessons we can still take from you, your firmness and your simplicity as you made it so abundantly clear, that all the bloodshed somehow had to be requited and that the Union had to be preserved and slavery had to be abolished. If it were not that way probably your words at Gettysburg would be a vanity because there you said "that these honored dead shall not have died in vain." There have been a lot of them and will we have to confess to future generations that maybe they did die in vain? What a frightful confession to stain the pages of our otherwise glorious history.

Mr. Lincoln, I'll be seeing you again.