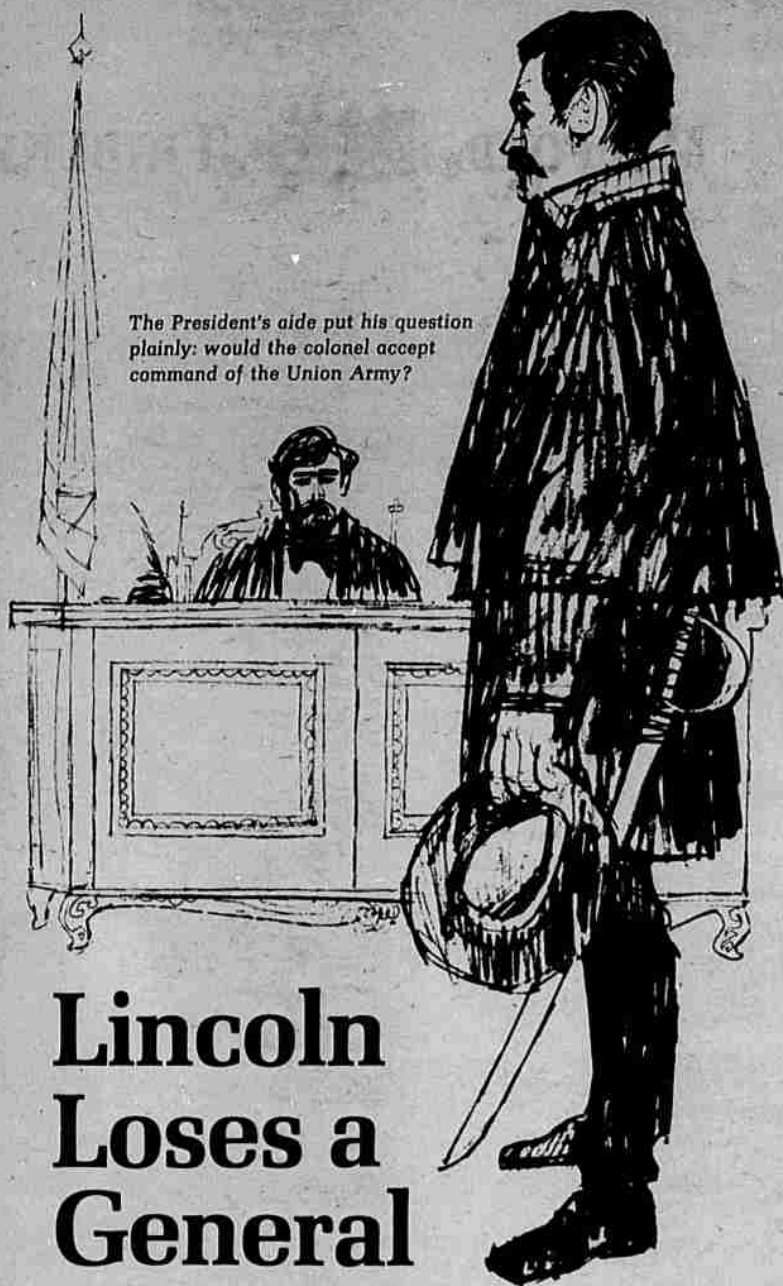


The President's aide put his question plainly: would the colonel accept command of the Union Army?



Lincoln Loses a General

There are agonizing moments in the lives of men and nations when the course of history is often determined; here is one of them

By **JERRY KLEIN**

ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT SHORE

THE SHOOTING at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, had decided the issue: the Union which had been founded in war would be tested in war. Already, the call for volunteers had gone out from Washington. What President Lincoln needed now was someone to lead them, a general to take the place of Winfield Scott. At 75, Scott was the veteran of four wars and ready to step down as commanding general of the Army.

Looking over the list of officers who might be entrusted with the responsibility of leading the Union at such a critical moment, Abraham Lincoln halted at the name of a man who was little-known to politicians but who had earned a reputation for courage and tactical skill. This officer, a colonel, was quiet to the point of taciturnity, but he had made his mark at West Point and had served valiantly in Mexico. In addition, Scott thought he would be worth 50,000 men.

"Well," the President told Francis P. Blair, an aide, "ask him to come and see you. If you think he may be our man, tell him he may be offered command of the Union Army."

Dismayed as he was by the approaching civil war, the officer was even more puzzled by the arrival of the message inviting him to come to an address in Washington, just down Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House. Riding through the streets of the Capital, he noticed the strain on people's faces, the strange urgency with which they walked and talked. These, indeed, were troubled times.

THE OFFICER tied his horse in front of the house to which he had been summoned. He was escorted into a room, and the door was closed behind him. "Colonel, I asked you to come here by authorization of the President," Blair told him. "He fears the trouble will grow. General Scott speaks well of you. What would your feelings be if offered command of the Union Army in his place?"

The officer felt unable to answer the question immediately. Always before, duty had determined his decisions, however distasteful.

But what was duty now?

Command of the Union Army would be a great opportunity, of course; a promotion, the chance to put military theories to stern test. Still, the colonel asked for a little time to think the matter over.

He rode home and went to his room "to wrestle with the haunting shadows of duty." The deliberation continued all day, and in the afternoon came word that Virginia, his native state, was seceding from the Union.

As evening fell, the officer's wife could hear him pacing up and down, back and forth; weeping "tears of blood" and falling to his knees in prayer for God's guidance. Hours later, he finally sat down at his desk, picked up a pen, and began to write:

General Scott:

Since my interview . . . I have felt that I ought no longer to retain my commission in the Army. I, therefore, tender my resignation, which I request you will recommend for acceptance. It would have been presented at once but for the struggle it has cost me to separate myself from a service to which I have devoted the best years of my life, and all the ability I possessed . . .

Save in the defense of my native state, I never desire again to draw my sword. Be pleased to accept my most earnest wishes for the continuance of your happiness and prosperity, and believe me most truly yours,

Robert E. Lee

COVER:

Photographer Curt Gunther focuses on the Pittsburgh Pirates' hard-hitting star, Bill Mazeroski. Read Bill's story on page 14: "Baseball Hero with a Wife to Match."

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