

Gettysburg: Lincoln's Speech

By MERTON T. AKERS
United Press International
The orator of the day came to the end of his speech.

"Down to the latest period of recorded time, in the glorious annals of our common country there will be no brighter page than that which relates to the battles of Gettysburg."

It was the closing sentence of a speech by Edward Everett, the foremost orator of the time, who addressed that day — Nov. 19, 1863 — a crowd of 15,000.

Now a cemetery was being dedicated for the men who fell there — the known and the unknown.

This was the crowning oration for Everett who had delivered a hundred or more. The ceremony had been postponed a month to give him time to prepare.

Everett ransacked history from Pericles to date for parallels to the event. He spoke in detail about the battle, pausing to pay tribute to the men who had fallen and "who sleep beneath our feet."

He spoke for an hour and 57 minutes. The audience was attentive — some contemporary accounts said it was spellbound.

Completing his peroration, his head flung back, his white hair awry, the orator paused dramatically and returned to his chair.

The Baltimore Glee Club of 100 voices sang a dirge written for the occasion.

Then Ward Hill Lamon, District of Columbia marshal and long-time friend of Lincoln, rose and said:

"The President of the United States."

Lincoln took a manuscript from an inside pocket, put on steel-rimmed glasses and stood high above the crowd.

The audience was restless after three hours of ceremonies. The fringes began to ravel away. A hum of talk rose.

Lincoln waited for the crowd to quiet.

Then he began to speak in the high-pitched voice Illinoisans knew so well but which rang as alien in this eastern land. But the treble tones carried to the farthest reach of the crowd because he had honed the voice on the stumps of Illinois political campaigns. Lincoln said:

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

"Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this."

"But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave their last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that we here shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Polite Recognition
Ten sentences — 269 words — two, perhaps three minutes — and the President had finished.

The audience scarcely had settled back when it was all over. The applause was perfunctory, a few hand claps, polite recognition for a man who "also spoke."

Another Chicago newspaper, the Times, called it "ally, flat and dishwatery."

The Philadelphia Bulletin said "not many will (read it) without a moistening of the eye and a swelling of the heart."

The London Times said it was "dull and commonplace."

And so on, most ridiculed it, a few praised.

Later Everett would write to the President about other things and include this line:

"I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came so near the central thought of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes."

Lincoln Pleas
Lincoln replied that he was "pleased to know that, in your judgment, the little I did say was not entirely a failure."

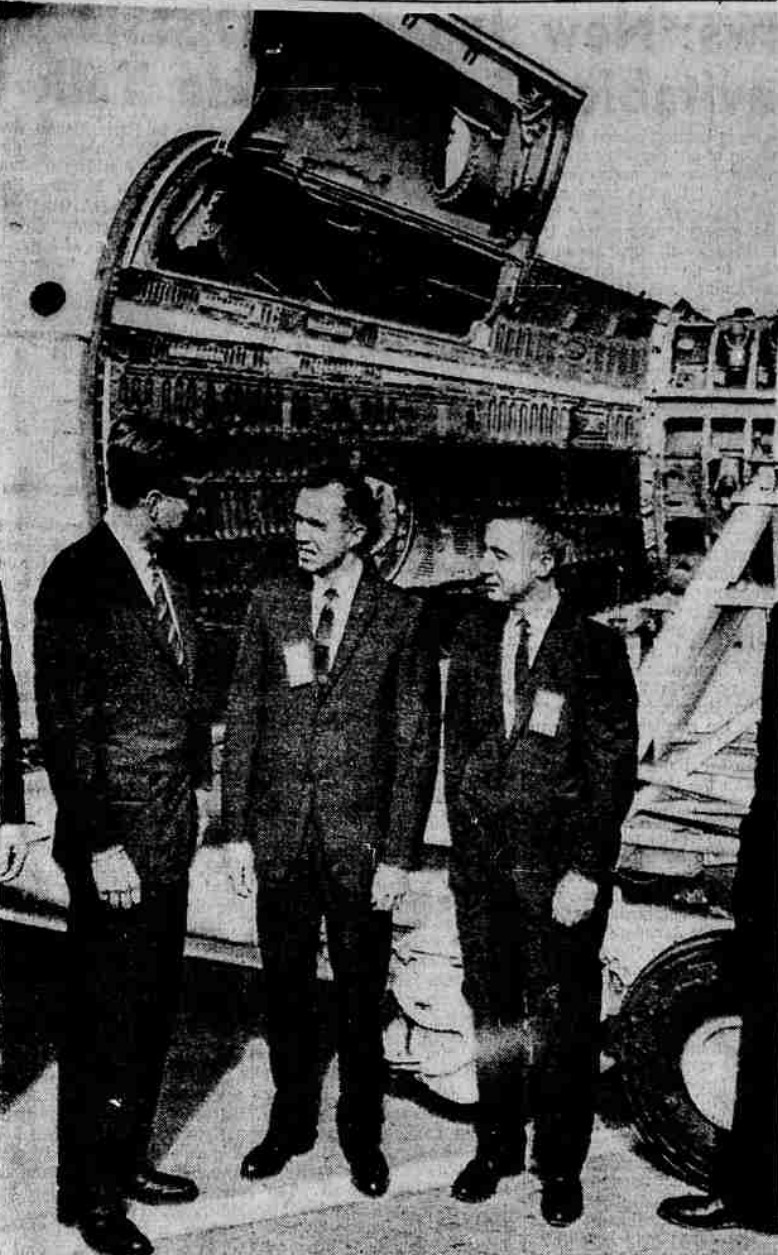
That night Lincoln returned to Washington on his four-car special train. He was tired and lay down on a seat in his drawing room and put a wet towel over his eyes.

About midnight he was back at the White House and learned that his son, Tad, who had been ill when he left, now was recovered.

In a week the President himself would be ill of varioloid, a mild form of smallpox.

And back in Gettysburg a New York Herald reporter strolled over the darkened battlefield in the faint glow of the moon and went back to the telegraph and added a paragraph to his news story:

"The air, the trees, the graves are silent. Even the relic hunters are gone now. And the soldiers here never wake to the sound of reveille."



MEETS ASTRONAUTS — President Kennedy talks with Mercury astronauts Gordon Cooper, center, and Gus Grissom, right, while standing in front of the first Gemini (two man space capsule) to arrive at Cape Canaveral for testing early in 1964. Kennedy included the Cape on a weekend speaking tour of Florida. (UPI)

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