



# **LINCOLN'S Mistake**

**THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE AND PECULIAR STORY  
ABOUT ABE LINCOLN'S VEEPS  
AND HOW THE WRONG ONE BECAME PRESIDENT**

**A SURPRISING EXPLANATION FOR AMERICA'S  
PERSISTENT RACISM**

**RUSS WOODY**

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**A SCREENPLAY**

**Lincoln's Mistake**

**PROLOGUE**

**TITLE FADES IN:**

***LINCOLN'S MISTAKE***

**DISSOLVE INTO:**

**CHYRON:**

***The events of this story are true.  
In 1864 Lincoln made a decision that would ultimately  
boost and preserve the racist sentiment of the Confederacy.  
A sentiment that is alive still.***

**OVER WHICH we hear:**

TRUMP (V.O.)  
We will not let them silence your  
voices!

**DISSOLVE INTO:**

**EXT. U.S. CAPITOL BUILDING - NEWS FOOTAGE**

HAZY SHOTS, JUMP CUTS of TRUMP SUPPORTERS breaking down  
barricades, climbing walls, smashing windows, clubbing cops.

TRUMP (V.O.)  
You have to show strength!

**INT. U.S. CAPITOL ROTUNDA - SAME TIME**

TRUMP SUPPORTERS are moving in and through the Rotunda.

**CHYRON:**

JANUARY 6, 2021

TRUMP (V.O.)

You're allowed to go by very different rules!

**ANGLE ON:** A WOMAN in a PINK MAGA SHIRT standing near a BLACK CAPITOL POLICEMAN.

BLACK POLICEMAN

Why you doin' this?

MAGA WOMAN

Because *nobody* voted for Biden!  
*Nobody!*

BLACK POLICEMAN

I did.

The MAGA Woman squints at him, then turns to the others.

MAGA WOMAN

Hey! This nigger voted for Biden!

TRUMP (V.O.)

You have to be strong!

**ANGLE ON:** A SQUATTING TRUMPER grimaces as he takes a shit in the corridor of the Capitol.

**INT. ANTEROOM TO SENATE CHAMBER - SAME TIME**

A TRUMP ENTHUSIAST carries a CONFEDERATE FLAG through the room.

**PICTURE FREEZES:** on CONFEDERATE FLAG.

TRUMP (V.O.)

We fight like hell and if you don't  
fight like hell, you're not going to  
have a country anymore!

The **FLAG SLOWLY BLURS** as it becomes **FRAMED** by the **P.O.V. of FIELD GLASSES**. **THE FLAG** then comes **BACK INTO FOCUS** and **BACK TO LIFE**. Except...

**NOW** the flag is being carried by a **CONFEDERATE SOLDIER**, fronting **OTHER CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS**.

LINCOLN (PRE-LAP)

*Well, gentlemen... it appears the  
Rebels have indeed arrived in  
Washington.*

**EXT. FORT STEVENS, WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY**

Now we see that the man holding the FIELD GLASSES is PRESIDENT LINCOLN (55). He's standing atop the fort's massive PARAPET (an earthen wall surrounding the fort).

CHYRON:

TRUE

*It had been 157 years since the last time  
a Confederate flag showed up in Washington.  
After so many years, why?*

Lincoln is amongst a small contingent of CIVILIANS/ DIGNITARIES, including Secretary of War EDWIN STANTON and DR. CHARLES CRAWFORD. They are being shown around the fort by General HORATIO WRIGHT (44) and a young Capt. OLIVER W. HOLMES (23).

GUNFIRE ERUPTS far off. A few of the men share concerned looks. Lincoln, however, is oblivious as he continues to squint into the field glasses.

CHYRON:

PROLOGUE

*Bullets Over Lincoln*

**EXT. FARM HOUSE - SAME TIME**

ESTABLISH a small two-story house in the distance.

**INT. FARM HOUSE DORMER- DAY**

A CONFEDERATE SHARPSHOOTER sits on a box and levers open the breech of his rifle. A SECOND SHARPSHOOTER FIRES his. A THIRD SOLDIER is looking through a MONOCULAR at the movement around the fort. (The window of the dormer looks out at Fort Stevens.)

MONOCULAR POV: Its ROUND IMAGE moves along the fort's parapet, where it comes upon the group of men.

SHARPSHOOTER (V.O.)

Looks to be maybe seven or eight,  
over to the right...

The image then MOVES PAST them along the wall before it stops, WHIPS BACK to the TALL LANKY GUY with the beard and the stovetop hat.

CHYRON:

TRUE  
*With his hat on,  
Lincoln was 7' tall.*

SHARPSHOOTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
No, no, no. Thah cain't be. Cain't  
be!

BACK TO: Sharpshooter

He slams the monocular into the arm of the next Sharpshooter  
and scrambles for his own rifle.

SHARPSHOOTER (CONT'D)  
Sweet Mary and Joseph! The right  
wall there to the right! The wall!  
You ain't gonna fuckin' believe it!

The other Sharpshooter puts the eyeglass up, then:

SHARPSHOOTER #2  
I'll be a sumbitch!

He quickly passes the monocular on and jerks his rifle up.

**EXT. FORT STEVENS PARAPET- SAME TIME**

GUNFIRE CONTINUES TO CRACK in the distance, when suddenly  
Dr. CHARLES CRAWFORD (standing next to Lincoln) is violently  
jolted. He looks down at his THIGH and sees it has BURST. As  
he drops, SCREAMING, the others see and quickly clamor for  
safety, one pulling him with them. As a couple of the men  
start tending to the injured doctor, WE HEAR:

LINCOLN (O.C.)  
General Wright -- some of our men in  
front there need to fall back...

The general looks up to see the president is *still* standing  
on the wall, still with the field glasses to his eyes while  
bullets fly past him. General Wright turns to Secretary of  
War Stanton.

GENERAL WRIGHT  
What the hell is he doing?

EDWIN STANTON  
I've seen the man make some bad  
choices. But this...

SOMEONE shouts out:

A VOICE (O.C.)  
Get down, you damn fool!

Lincoln lowers the field glasses, looks curiously at the YOUNG MAN who yelled. The young man, in turn, looks around as though wondering who might've spoken so disrespectfully to the president.

CHYRON:

***Future Supreme Court Justice  
Captain Oliver Wendell Holmes***

Lincoln turns back and lifts the field glasses again to watch the goings-on -- while MORE BULLETS WHIZ PAST HIS HEAD.

GENERAL WRIGHT  
(shouts)  
Mr. President! Get down or I will  
have you forcibly taken down!

Impulsively, the general reaches up, grabs Lincoln's arm and PULLS HIM DOWN to safety. Lincoln, a little surprised, reluctantly sits and adjusts his legs. Then:

LINCOLN  
(disgruntled)  
I thought I was the Commander in  
Chief.

CHYRON:

***To this day no one is really sure  
why Lincoln had been so careless.***

NERVY SOLDIER (PRE-LAP)  
*So, lemme ask you this...*

**EXT. KITTERY, MAINE - DAY**

Beneath a dazzling summer sun, the placid water of Pepperrell Cove pushes small waves at the boulders of a rocky shoreline where tall grass sweeps uphill past a defensive battery to a proud HEXAGONAL BLOCKHOUSE atop the hill.

NERVY SOLDIER (PRE-LAP)  
*...bein' as how you're somebody famous  
an' well-known an' such...*

CHYRON:

**FORT McCLARY, MAINE**

**Meanwhile...**

NERVY SOLDIER (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)  
*...an' bein' as how I got this  
opportunity at conversin' with you...*

**INT. FORT MCCLARY KITCHEN - SAME TIME**

LIGHT STREAMS into an otherwise gray kitchen, where industrial ovens along a back wall make this a virtual hot house.

HAMLIN (O.C.)  
I'm listening...

The NERVY SOLDIER, scruffy, is leaning back against a wooden PREP TABLE, one sleeve rolled up, picking at a scab on his elbow.

NERVY SOLDIER  
See, I been scratchin' my head as to  
why it is you made this particular  
and peculiar choice...

Now we see he's talking to a younger HANNIBAL HAMLIN (55), currently skinning a potato, an apron over his sweat-stained PRIVATE'S UNIFORM.

HAMLIN  
And what choice is that?

NERVY SOLDIER  
The decidin' you made as to be workin'  
here as a lowly dog robber, peelin'  
taters an' cookin' up sinkers for a  
buncha past-prime and pimply-faced  
grunts. It is perplexing.

HAMLIN  
If you must know, Private Stark, I  
joined the military solely to answer  
my country's call to duty...

NERVY SOLDIER  
Uh-huh, uh-huh... Well, see I been  
contemplating 'bout that, an' 'bout  
the only concludin' I been able to  
surmise is that there is bitterness.

HAMLIN  
I can assure you, private, there is  
no bitterness.

NERVY SOLDIER  
Uh-huh, uh-huh...

A SOLDIER with a BASKET of potatoes has ENTERED, plops it down beside Hamlin.

POTATO SOLDIER  
This here's the last of 'em, Mr.  
Hamlin, sir.

HAMLIN  
Thank you. And you needn't address me  
as anything more than Private Hamlin.

POTATO SOLDIER  
Wull, okay, but it don't seem right,  
bein' as how you're presently the  
vice president of the United States.

HAMLIN  
Nonetheless, at this fort, I am  
"Private Hamlin." Nothing more.

POTATO SOLDIER  
(thinks about it)  
Okay. Wull, okay.

He then stiffens and whips into a brisk salute.

POTATO SOLDIER (CONT'D)  
Good day, Mr. Private Hamlin!

He snaps his salute and EXITS. As Hamlin drops a potato into a bucket of water.

CHYRON:

TRUE

***While he was vice president of the United States,  
Hannibal Hamlin joined the military and worked as a cook.***

Hamlin wipes sweat off his brow and picks up another potato.  
The Nervy Soldier is still picking at his scab and surmising.

NERVY SOLDIER  
See, I'm guessin' this bitterness is  
'cause dear Father Abraham has saw fit  
to pick that Southern fella 'steada you  
for this upcomin' electoral procession  
comin' 'round this November. What's  
that fella's name? John-ston. Somethin'  
John-ston.

HAMLIN

Andrew Johnson. And that decision, sir, was not made by the president, but at the convention in Baltimore. As well, Mr. Lincoln has assured me of as much. He made clear that he has, and has *had*, complete faith in me as his vice president.

NERVY SOLDIER

Uh-huh, uh-huh. So if he wins hisself a second go-round, you are officially mustered out. An' still, not no smidge a bitterness?

Hamlin stares at him, considers uncharacteristic violence.

HAMLIN

Private Stark... if we are done here, I have work to do...

NERVY SOLDIER

Uh-huh...

Hamlin snaps up another potato as the Nervy Soldier pulls the scab off his elbow and examines it intently.

ANOTHER SOLDIER ENTERS with PANS and KETTLE POTS that CLINK and CLANG. He stops to announce:

SOLDIER WITH POTS

Hey, all! Heard the skunks squawkin' over at O.Q. -- Captain Morse sayin' Ol' Abe nearly got hisself shot at Fort Stevens. Some Reb tree-frogs sendin' hornets right past his head.

(off their doubtful looks)

Mother's grave. Check the grapevine ya don't believe me!

(*Grapevine* -- the telegraph.) The Pot Soldier EXITS into the back storage room, BANGING the pots against the doorway jamb.

NERVY SOLDIER

Well, if that don't beat the devil. Dirty Rebs shootin' at our president's head.

HAMLIN

(a deep breath)

Thank God he's all right.

NERVY SOLDIER

(studies Hamlin)

Really?

(off his look)

Just seems like a puzzling thing to  
say, bein' as how you woulda ended  
up the biggest toad in the puddle.

HAMLIN

Mr. Stark... have you no  
responsibilities around here?

The Nervy Soldier flicks the scab away and pushes off the  
table. Then thinks to add:

NERVY SOLDIER

Hey, don't feel bad. Could be somebody  
else'll shoot him...

He EXITS, as Hamlin considers hurling the knife after him.

**END PROLOGUE**