# Military Telegraph Under Lincoln

## By ALBERT CHANDLER

FOR sometime after hostilities had begun, the lines and property of the American Telegram Company in the East, of the Western Union Telegraph Company in the West, and the Southwestern Telegraph Company in a part of that section of the country were availed of by the Government for military purposes without any direct control therefor on the part of the Government. But as the fearful proportions of the Rebellion were disclosed, and the importance of Government control of the quickest means of communication came to be understood, the Military Telegraph was established as a separate organization, and it was wisely made an arm of the War Department, directly responsible to the Secretary in the field.

It is not my purpose now to recount details of the achievements of this organization, nor to recite even an outline of its history; but it may be interesting to know that it comprised about twelve hundred employees, of whom, as far as I have been able to ascertain, less than one hundred and fifty survive. They were a goodly company of brave and talented spirits. The work they performed and the dangers they encountered, the intelligence and faithfulness they displayed, and the great results which they played an important part in accomplishing, were to my knowledge well understood and keenly appreciated by President Lincoln and Secretary Stanton, who were more familiar with the whole scope of the telegraphers' work than were any other general officers of the Government. Their work was, however, scarcely less appreciated by Generals Grant, Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan, Meade, McClellan, Banks, Butler, and other principal commanders in the field, as shown by their official reports and in their private conversations.

### Lincoln Had No Operator

IT has sometimes been said of me that I was Lincoln's telegraph operator in the White House. The fact is that no one was his telegraph operator, and no telegraph wires were connected with the White House in his time. I have always considered that I was fortunate in being one of the three cipher operators in Military Telegraph service in the old War Department building, and to be often with Mr. Lincoln during the time of his greatest burden and anxiety. My immediate associates were Charles Tinker and Homer Bates. Our duties were equal and coördinate in the performance of the important and confidential service that we were called upon to render. Mr. Stanton's secretary used to refer to us as the "Sacred Three." Much of the time I alone occupied the room adjoining the private office of the Secretary of War, Mr. Stanton. This was often spoken of as the President's room, for it was to it that he came nearly every day in his anxiety to learn the latest news of the various armies, and the talks he had there with the telegraph boys and Major Eckert, their superintendent, seemed to afford him genuine diversion. Frequently, too, he had interviews there with the Secretary of War, the Secretary of State, and of the Treasury, with the Judge Advocate General, the General in chief, and the other of the chief officers of the Government.

I first saw Mr. Lincoln at Allegheny, Pennsylvania, when he was on his way to Washington to assume the task of reconciling a great nation to itself; for it was even then clear that his administration was to be fraught with difficulties such as had not fallen on any previous President of the United States, although I believe that neither he nor any other citizen of the Republic had then any expectation that so terrible and destructive a war was pending. He was received there with great enthusiasm by the multitude that had gathered to see him, and acknowledged their demonstrations with the homely dignity that was peculiar to him, and without making any speech. As both telegraph operator and railway agent, I was among the few who were privileged to enter the private car in which he and his family were making their journey, and I shall never forget the deep impression which his towering form and his already sad and always kindly face made on me as he took my hand. I had then no expectation of seeing him again during his presidency.

### Got Up Before Daylight

THE next time I remember of his speaking to me was early one morning, perhaps six o'clock, soon after I went to Washington. I had been on duty all night. He left the office as late as ten or eleven o'clock the night before; but so anxious was he for news from the armies that he often came over from the White House soon after daylight to see the despatches which had come in during the night. He seemed amused at finding me in exactly the same position, writing at my desk, in which he had seen me the night before, and as he came in he said: "Have you been sitting there all night?" Then he read over the new messages addressed to the various officers of the Government, both civil and military, carbon copies of which we made on letter-size tissue-paper and placed without folding in a little drawer in what we called the cipher desk. The contents of this drawer were for his special information. The messages were placed in it in the order of their reception, and he was careful to keep them so.

It was his habit to read from the top down, and when he came to those which he had already read, with a smile he said: "Well, I guess I have got down to the raisins." As I seemed in doubt as to what that might mean, he explained that a little girl, having eaten improperly both in quantity and quality, beginning with a lot of raisins, was made quite ill, and could find relief only in the process which a sick stomach is likely to compel. After an exhausting siege she gave an exclamation of satisfaction that the end of her trouble was near, for she had "got down to the raisins." I suppose that I have heard Mr. Lincoln use the expression a dozen times at least, when he had finished reading the new messages in his drawer and had reached those which he had read before.

One day soon after this, hearing a newsboy on Pennsylvania-ave., in front of the War Department, calling out in a singsong way, "Here's yer Philadelphia Inquiry!" he mimicked him, and then said: "Did I ever tell you the joke the Chicago newsboys had on me?" Receiving a negative reply, he said: "A short time before my nomination I was at Chicago attending a lawsuit. A photographer of that city asked me to sit for a picture, and I did so. This coarse rough hair of mine was in a particularly bad tousle, and the picture presented me in all its fright. After my nomination, this being about the only picture of me there was, copies were struck to show those who had never seen me how I looked. The newsboys carried them around to sell, and had for their cry, 'Here's yer Old Abe! He'll look better when he gets his hair combed,'" and he laughed over it as heartily as if it was a good joke on somebody else that had just occurred.

A friend of mine in New York wrote me, asking for a picture of Mr. Lincoln, with his autograph upon it; so I bought a couple of good photographs of him, and when he came in that evening asked him to put his name on them, remarking that I supposed he was frequently annoyed by similar applications, but I would much like to please my New York friend. He said: "Well, I suppose you know that men will stand a good deal when they are flattered a little." I smiled doubtfully, and he continued, without waiting for me to reply: "You haven't learned that yet? Well, you needn't remain any longer in ignorance of it, because it's so." I told him that I would remember it, and thanked him for the autograph, which he had finished while talking to me.

He was much in the habit of sitting with his feet on a table, or desk, or chair. In cold weather, during all my observation of him, he wore a large gray shawl, and never an overcoat. This shawl he usually hung over the top of the inner door of the office as he came in, a position in which a man of ordinary height could not place it.

### A Laborious Writer

YOU may like to know, as probably most of you do not, that his composition, in writing, was slow, and apparently somewhat labored, and his writing itself was a comparatively slow process. While writing, as I have often seen him, sitting directly opposite me, and at the same table, he was accustomed to look out of the window between his sentences, scratch his head, usually his right temple, for his sentences in his mind, often moving his lips in actual whisper of the words, and then write them out, rarely erasing, interlining, or correcting; and when he had finished, what simple and perfect diction it was! His style of composition was as peculiar and novel as himself, and always in simple, terse, and clear language. He sometimes read aloud, and in doing so would occasionally purposely mispronounce words and misplace inflection and accent, as if musing as he read.

His keen sense of the ridiculous extended to little things, and he was as perfect a mimic as his large frame would permit. A good example was this: Albert Johnson Mr. Stanton's private secretary and personal accountant, was a man of unusually small stature, weighing perhaps a hundred and ten pounds, and his deportment was extremely polite. On one occasion Mr. Lincoln wanted to refer to the Bible, and he asked Johnson to bring it. Johnson danced out of the room to get it; but not finding it quickly, and fearing that the President might become impatient, he ran back to explain that he had not found it yet, but would have it presently. He finally brought it, with an apology for the delay, and, with low repeated bows, retired. After Mr. Lincoln had made the desired use of the book, he ran nimbly into the adjoining room, just as Johnson had done, reappeared, then made his delivery of the book in the same fashion, greatly to his own and our amusement. This may not strike anybody as funny; but