From the Archives

"Give Us Victories"

On 25 January 1863, Joseph Hooker was appointed to command the Army of the Potomac. He replaced Ambrose Burnside, in whom the country was and the President had lost confidence—after the failure and carnage of the Battle of Fredericksburg. The self-confident Hooker had gained a reputation for aggressiveness, as reflected in his sobriquet, "Fighting Joe." Well-known to President Lincoln, too, was Hooker's outspoken criticism of his administration and of previous Army commanders. The next day, the Commander-in-Chief met with his new top field commander and, during the interview, handed him the following note. Among other things, this extraordinary document provides a measure of both men and of the American civilian-military relationship:

> Major General Hooker
> Executive Mansion
> Washington, January 26, 1863
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> General,
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> I have placed you at the head of the Army of the Potomac. Of course I have done this upon what appear to me to be sufficient reasons. And yet I think it best for you to know that there are some things in regard to which, I am not quite satisfied with you. I believe you to be a brave and skillful soldier, which of course, I like. I also believe you do not mix politics with your profession, in which you are right. You have confidence in yourself, which is a valuable, if not an indispensable quality. You are ambitious, which, within reasonable bounds, does good rather than harm. But I think that during Gen. Burnside's command of the Army, you have taken counsel of your ambition, and thwarted him as much as you could, in which you did a great wrong to the country, and to a most meritorious and honorable brother officer. I have heard, in such way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the Army and the Government needed a Dictator. Of course it was not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you the command. Only those generals who gain successes, can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship. The government will support you to the utmost of its ability, which is neither more nor less than it has done and will do for all commanders. I much fear that the spirit which you have aided to infuse into the Army, of criticising their Commander, and withholding confidence from him, will now turn upon you. I shall assist you as far as I can, to put it down. Neither you, nor Napoleon, if he were alive again, could get any good out of an army, while such spirit prevails in it.
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> And now, beware of rashness. Beware of rashness, but with energy, and sleepless vigilance, go forward, and give us victories.
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> Yours very truly,
>
> A. Lincoln

Source: Richard J. Sommers, ed., *Vignettes of Military History, Volume III* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army Military History Research Colleciton, now the US Army Military History Institute [USAHI], February 1982), Vignette No. 137, contributed by Dennis Vetock, drawn form Roy P Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*; Walter H. Hebert, Fighting Joe Hooker; Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General*; T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*.