

The following is from an audio recording and in some cases, it may be incomplete, or inaccurate due to inaudible passages, or other transcription errors. Nothing from this show or any others would be construed as legal advice. Please consult an attorney for any legal issue. Nothing from this show is endorsed by the Federal Government, Air Force, or any of its components. All content and opinions are those of our guests and host. The inclusion of hyperlinks and references does not imply any endorsement by the author(s), by the Federal Government, Air Force, or any of its components. They are meant to provide an additional perspective or as a supplementary resource. The Department of the Air Force or any other department or agency of the United States Government does not exercise any responsibility or oversight of the content at the link destination.



Lieutenant Colonel Charles
Gartland, USAF

AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 53

Book Review – Lincoln on Leadership with Lt Col Charles Gartland

HOSTS: CAPTAIN ERIN DAVIS AND CAPTAIN CHARLIE HEDDEN

GUEST: LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHARLES GARTLAND

In this Episode, hosts Capt Erin Davis and Capt Charlie Hedden, along with guest Lt Col Charles Gartland, review the *Lincoln on Leadership: Executive Strategies for Tough Times*, by Donald T. Phillips.

[Music: Band playing clip of Air Force song]

CAPTAIN ERIN DAVIS:

Hello everyone. Welcome back to The Air Force Judge Advocate General's School Podcast. We are your hosts, Captain Erin Davis, and Captain Charlie Hedden. And of course, today we are joined by Lieutenant Colonel Gartland, who is one of the other instructors here at The JAG School. He is, in fact, the Law Chair, a very prestigious position indeed.

And today, we are going to discuss the first book in our Chief's Leadership Library, series 2021. And that book is *Lincoln on Leadership*, by Donald T. Phillips. For those who were thinking about reading this one, it is a little

less than 200 pages, about 170. And USA Today said it was "Remarkable ... a lively and entertaining study that delivers uncommon good sense."

So we are here to discuss that book today and highlight some of the takeaways from Lincoln's leadership. Maybe commanders can apply in their own leadership here in the Air Force. So, gentlemen, let's see. What did you think of the book? Did you think it was a lively and entertaining study delivering uncommon good sense?

REVIEW OF BOOK

LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHARLES GARTLAND:

Yeah, a couple of things on that, Erin. Yes. I actually approached this book with a bit of skepticism, kind of

seeing it as another book to throw on the pile of that endless mountain of management books that have been churned out over the years.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes.

LT COL GARTLAND:

And there really are thousands and thousands of them. I know that there are even services out there that are devoted to summarizing all the management books that are published on a monthly basis, because no one has time to actually read them all. [laughter]

So I think what's remarkable about this book is it really kind of cut a, it cut a novel path, no pun intended, through that pile to try and showcase leadership in a unique way. So here, basically what Phillips does is he takes a historical figure with whom we're all familiar, of course, and one still, I think survived—survived the critique of time, still fairly well-regarded president, probably the most popular president.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yep, and hasn't been canceled yet—as far as we know.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Hasn't been canceled yet, and basically takes his shepherding of the nation through the greatest, at least up to that point in time, the greatest constitutional and military crisis in the nation's history, shepherds us through it, and takes the lessons of leadership from that and distills it down to points that can be applied, hopefully to everyday scenarios today. And I would like, perhaps we'll have a chance Erin, toward the end here to maybe discuss after we've gotten into some of the substance of the book, whether Phillips has succeeded in providing something that's still applicable to the environment, to the information saturated, hectic environment of today.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes, sir. So overall, I felt like this was a very readable book in terms of style. It's not a historical book, per se. You were talking about that before that it's really more—the book is broken down into different sections focusing on different leadership tips or traits that Lincoln had. And I do think it made it a little bit more approachable because it wasn't like reading a biography of Lincoln.

Right now, I'm reading *Team of Rivals* by Doris Kearns Goodwin, which is an excellent, no federal endorsement intended, but really awesome book if you're looking to find out more about Lincoln if this podcast sparks your interest. But I think this was more approachable in the sense that he really took the book and he made it more of a management or leadership book where he focused on different topics and things that Lincoln did or traits that Lincoln had that made him an effective leader, at least as far as we can tell historically. And kind of used examples from Lincoln's leadership during the Civil War when he first became president, even some of the stuff that he did when he was an attorney in Illinois to outline those things and provide examples of how Lincoln was able to effectively lead the country in a very divisive time.

LT COL GARTLAND:

One of the criticisms out there that I saw repeatedly, which I didn't think was fair on my reading of it, was that the book oversimplified many of the historical illustrations that were made in the book and I thought that was unfair because it's pretty clear that this is not an academic biography or historical assessment.

CAPT DAVIS:

Right.

LT COL GARTLAND:

There are plenty of those out there.

You made a book reference, Erin. So I've got one of my own. Right now I happened to be writing a book review for Air University on one by the University of Kansas Press. It's entitled *Opposing Lincoln: Clement L. Gladdingham, Presidential Power in the Legal Battle Over Dissent in Wartime*, which is actually pretty readable, but heavily, unlike this book, heavily footnoted and academic, and actually brings up one of the generals who reappears in this book quite a few times—that was General Burnside, with whom Lincoln had all sorts of all sorts of exasperations. But overall, no, I really thought that this book delivered. Yes, the author is clearly a fan of Lincoln.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes.

LT COL GARTLAND:

And in fact one of the criticisms I saw over and over again was that this was fan mail [laughter] essentially for Lincoln.

CAPT DAVIS:

He does love Lincoln.

LT COL GARTLAND:

And he lionized him repeatedly throughout the book. Which on occasion does get a bit, a bit tiresome. But then again, if this is a book on leadership and not a historical work, then it really wouldn't make much sense for him to be dissing Lincoln, because that really wouldn't make for a very helpful book on how to be a good leader or manager.

CAPT DAVIS:

Right.

LT COL GARTLAND:

So I don't think some of the criticisms are fair. And this book shows that. And so I think puts into stark relief that while there IS this mythology of Lincoln, and the author, again, he contributes to it quite a bit, but at the

same time illustrates that he was living Lincoln, was a man, a real person, living in time who had to deal with all of the immediate pressures of the day.

CAPT DAVIS:

Right. So I think that's probably a good segue way into talking specifically about the book and what are the leadership lessons that Phillips points out. So, again, the book is structured, our book, the one that Colonel Garland and I read is structured

LT COL GARTLAND:

The right one, Charles.

CAPT DAVIS:

The right one. Each chapter is its own leadership lesson. It kind of had real ACSC vibes—I'm doing ACSC online—and a lot of these things are there. I'm not going to say that they are obscure leadership concepts, these are definitely things that you've heard before. And it's just interesting, I think, from the perspective of seeing how Lincoln embodied or dealt with these issues and how he exemplified some of these leadership habits, because a lot of this stuff is probably not going to sound very new or unique or special. It's stuff that we have. We're all studying leadership all the time so this stuff is not.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Absolutely they're not new points.

CAPT DAVIS:

Right.

LT COL GARTLAND:

What's novel about this is how it's conveyed, right? The vehicle that's used, which is the Lincoln presidency.

CAPT DAVIS:

Exactly. So I thought we could take a few of the overall lessons of the book and kind of break them down and talk a little bit about how Lincoln embodied these lessons or the examples that the book gave.

LT COL GARTLAND:

And you mentioned earlier Erin, Lincoln, the person and his humanity. And I thought it was interesting and telling of the rest of the book that it kicked off—so chapter one, we might as well start right with chapter one. It kicks off talking about Lincoln, the man, and how it was that he interacted people. The title of the chapter was “Get Out of the Office and Circulate among the Troops”.

And Why? Two primary reasons that the author points out. First was so that you can obtain firsthand information from people because you’re only going to get the truth from people, from your subordinates, if you’re accessible to them. And the author pointed out that, and you mentioned, Erin, that in this book does bring up some of the anecdotes from when he was a lawyer. He started out as a country lawyer, later on in his career he was basically a corporate lawyer, a railroad industry lawyer. But as a lawyer, Lincoln knew that you had to have the facts. You had to have command of the facts, and you would only know that in his situation by knowing the people. So that was the first reason for leadership, by walking around as I think JAG publication once referred to it.

And then number two, he needed to have a personal connection with people. You don’t have a leadership style if you don’t have an audience, as Phillips puts it.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes, so there’s a really nice example of this “see and be seen” where Lincoln is out watching troops march by and he’s standing on some sort of balcony, I think at the White House, and it’s raining really hard. And one of the aides is like, “Hey, sir, President Lincoln” you know, “why don’t you come inside since it’s raining really hard?” But he’s out there waving to all these troops who are marching past, you know, to go fight in the Civil War. And he stays out there and he says “You know, if they can do it, there’s no reason that I can’t do it.” You know, if I’m asking them to do it, how can I not be doing it myself? And I thought that was really a good illustration of who Lincoln was as a leader when it came to getting to know

his people, was that he was willing to do the things that he was asking other people to do for him.

And he was very approachable and open. He had a very literal open-door policy, where he would, the book talks about how people literally lined the halls outside of his office to come and speak to him about all sorts of different stuff. And he saw everyone who came to his door. They weren’t all maybe value added to his day, but he had a very literal open-door policy, and people felt that he was approachable and the book sort of talks about how, you know, if you have this kind of approachable personality and you’re out and about and people will see you, that people tend to have a more positive impression of you as a leader, because you are you’re more open, you’re more approachable, you’re a person to them. You’re not someone who’s behind a locked door. You’re not just a figurehead. You’re someone they can talk to you and can bring problems to. And that, you know, that made him a more—someone who is viewed more positively, especially by the troops out in the field, like he was so celebrated when he came by, you know, because he went out to battle, he is the only president who’s ever been in an open hostile conflict where he got shot at.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Right. Only president to take direct fire. I was I mean, I learned a lot, actually, from this book. And that was that was one of the points of which I was unaware. In fact, his personal secretary, one of his personal secretaries, was quoted as saying that Lincoln spent 75% of his time meeting with people, which explains that open-door policy that you were talking about and how people lined the hallways to talk to him.

And in fact, even Phillips has a chart in the book, which I thought was really telling. And it lays out month by month over a four-year period how many days Lincoln was out of the office in any given month. And what you see over four years, essentially, is that if Lincoln had an out of office box to check on his Outlook, he was pretty frequently out ten to 15 days per month. And on numerous occasions even more than that.

CAPT DAVIS:

And it's interesting to, you know, it's funny because, and I don't know if this is more reflective of a different time. I mean, he was assassinated. So obviously there was a risk to him. But you, it's hard to imagine a modern-day president doing the things that Lincoln did. Lincoln just would walk out of the White House and down the street to wait, like the telegraph office for news about a battle.

And he would just wander to other people's offices, I think to the point that some of the people who worked for him got a little irritated, because he would just show up at their office like the Department of State, and he'd be like in Seward's office. And you like, "Hey, how's it going? Let's chat." And Seward would be like, "I'm kind of busy sir." [laughter]

LT COL GARTLAND:

When you when you're president, I guess you can show up uninvited. That was his, I think that was his—but in his security team, and he did have one back then, it mentions in the book that they many times tried to restrain him and pull him back and were NOT able to do so.

CAPT DAVIS:

No.

LT COL GARTLAND:

This is, now that you bring it up anyway. I think this one of the aspects of the book that does, well one of the examples, that Phillips furnishes that does NOT translate to feasibility today.

CAPT DAVIS:

No.

LT COL GARTLAND:

To the extent that we're going to look at applicability of this book to today, I think that this is one of the aspects where we can't really find much contemporary plausibility. There are others that I would argue, and we'll get to those during this discussion, where we

absolutely could apply them today. But I think this is one area where it's hard to jive it with the modern world. Go ahead Charlie.

CAPTAIN CHARLIE HEDDEN:

Well, I had almost the exact opposite thought, but I wasn't, that's because I wasn't thinking about it at the presidential level. I think you're exactly right about the presidential level.

CAPT DAVIS:

Right.

CAPT HEDDEN:

But I was reminded of, particularly the current and immediate past Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force, who do appear to spend a ton of their time among the troops listening to them, finding out what they do, and getting to know their constituents and I thought that was a lesson that lots of leaders can take away from this.

And one of the reasons I thought was, from my personal perspective, and I bet a lot of people share this, is when your superiors are making decisions that affect you, the extent to which you perceive their actual knowledge of you and your situation, I think really impacts your buy-in on those. If I think that the decisions that from a president on down to my immediate supervisor, if I think that they're making those decisions and they have data from actually spending time with the people that are going to be impacted, that's going to that's going to at least help get me to a place where I'm okay with those—where I have some buy in and some support for those. Where I think we've probably all served in some capacity under a leader who does tend to spend more of their time doing work behind closed doors and, you know, at their desk and valuable as all that work might be. It really makes you question, I think, whether they even know. I think we all, especially when you get something from so many layers above you, and you wonder did they have any idea what this was going to do to my daily life when they made this decision.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Right, right. No, no, that's an excellent point. I think actually we can probably settle this aspect of applicability by saying NOT perhaps that relevant at the presidential level, as you said, but CERTAINLY applicable in our day-to-day military life, whether online or, you know, within the JAG Corps. Absolutely. In fact, that's, so Phillips is really good at doing this. He sums it all up. He always has a great way of kind of crystallizing the thought to get exactly what you're saying. Charlie. So he finished up chapter one by saying, quote, "By entering your subordinate's environment, by establishing frequent human contact, you create a sense of commitment, collaboration, and community."

CAPT DAVIS:

Lincoln, I think the, probably the number one thing about him, apart from maybe his honesty and humility, those personal traits, was how excellent a communicator he was. Especially we talked about this a little bit before. Lincoln was really big on the parable and the storytelling. And I learned from the Goodwin book, that was because his father, who was illiterate and was a farmer, used to regale other farmers socially. You know, it was like they were going home and watching TV or anything. And he would tell these stories. And little Lincoln, you know, seven-year-old Abraham would sit there and memorize all the stories that his father told around the fire. And then he would go and he would repeat them for his friends. And he used these stories. Yes they were very illustrative—did I say that right? I get that word wrong a lot.

LT COL GARTLAND:

That's my favorite pronunciation of the word, Erin. Well done.

CAPT DAVIS:

"Ill-la-STRAY-tive"? "Ill-LUH-struh-tiv"?

LT COL GARLAND:

"Ill-LUH-struh-tiv". And it sounds more illustrious when you say it that way.

CAPT DAVIS:

Thank you. But he didn't talk down to people, but he was an effective communicator. He knew who his audience was. And he used these stories to illustrate the point that he wanted to make. Sometimes when you read them as a contemporary reader, they're a little hard to navigate because it's always like oh, you know, two dogs running on either side of a fence, but then there's a hole in the fence and neither dog will go through it because they were all show. You know, these kinds of stories, that contemporarily when we read them, you're kind of like, all right. But then they were so effective for the audience that he was speaking to at the time.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Sure, still predominantly an agricultural society at that point. Right? I mean, we're heading here into the Industrial Revolution in America in the 1860s. But still, you're going to find, I don't know if it's still majority agricultural, but certainly a large portion. I think it still was majority agricultural society. But certainly many, many, many people, most Americans could identify with a lot of those examples.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yeah. And I think the takeaway here though, for us at our level, is knowing who your audience is and thinking about how you communicate with your folks, not just in big speeches at all calls and things like that, but, you know, our Commandant now, Colonel Jones, when we had our first staff meeting, she talked about how she thinks that her policy is, and she thinks it's a good one, is that to be clear is to be kind to your folks, and to make sure that your people understand what you are looking for from them.

You know, we advise people in LORs, as we say, you know, put the expectation in there. Make it clear what your expectations are for your folks. And I think communication is a big part of that because the better you can be at communicating the things that you're looking for, you know, the better chance your people have actually delivering and giving you what you want.

And I think people are more satisfied when you have clear guidance from your leadership.

LT COL GARTLAND:

That's fascinating point. I mean, essentially that clarity is an act of charity. I did not know, I'd love to take that up with Colonel Jones at some point, but I think it's a great point because it's really easy to communicate something in a complex, garbled way that no one can comprehend. But it takes time to actually refine those points and understand really what it is that you're saying so that people can appreciate what it is that you're trying to communicate.

And it's, so since we're on the topic of communication here, Lincoln invested, as you were saying, in a tremendous amount of energy and time into communication and it mentioned here something else I didn't know about Lincoln, that he would often precede, and as you said, it wasn't just the big speeches, although certainly for that as well, but even for important conversations and personal conversations that he was going to have with officials, with his military leadership, that he would actually precede those conversations by writing it out ahead of time.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes.

LT COL GARTLAND:

And then a follow up, based on those initial notes. After the meeting was concluded, he would follow up with a personal letter to the individual. So that, to hit your point, Erin, so that it would be crystal clear with the person exactly what his intent was.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes. And I thought that was so interesting. I thought maybe the modern-day corollary would be, you know, the per our conversation e-mail. But that was really what Lincoln did, was he would call, especially if he was having an issue with something, you know, we know from a team of rivals that Lincoln hired a lot of men to

work for him, who he thought would be great for the job, but did not necessarily like him or agree with him. But he was still the boss and he still owned that leadership position over them.

So he would call them in. He would explain what he was looking for, and why maybe he was disappointed with something they had done, or why he was pleased with something they had done. And then he would hand them a letter on their way out. And it would be a rehashing of all of those thoughts. But in a more formal specific way. And it was again, you know, we have little examples of those throughout this book. It was always crystal clear, exactly what Lincoln wanted from them, and why his expectations were or were not met, and what those expectations would be going forward.

LT COL GARTLAND:

And I think you nailed it there, Erin. Today, the equivalent of it would really be the follow up per our discussion e-mail. Although it would be something else to have your supervisor hand you a letter after the meeting was concluded. I suppose better than a preferral of charges [laughter], but that would be, that would be something else. But absolutely, I think this is one of the areas where we really could apply it to our everyday experience.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yeah. And I mean, it doesn't have to be quite so literal. Lincoln was a big fan of writing out his thoughts on paper, and especially if he was upset about something or he received criticism. He did what I think a lot of therapists recommend, right? Which is if you write an angry letter that he just wouldn't send.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Yes.

CAPT DAVIS:

And I think, though, there's something to be said for getting your thoughts out and articulating them, instead of just meeting the people when you're really pissed about something or when tempers are high. Lincoln

never did that. He always took the time to sit down. He would write these little angry letters. He would never, he had cubbyholes. You know, like a cubbyhole in his roll top desk where he stuck all his, like anger letters, and he never sent them. But it helped him refine his thoughts so he could have

LT COL GARTLAND:

And vent!

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes!

LT COL GARTLAND:

It was catharsis.

CAPT DAVIS:

It was catharsis.

LT COL GARTLAND:

It was kind of Lincoln as a psychoanalyst here.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yeah. And there's a chapter in the book that really we're not really going to talk about too much, but it was called Never Act out of Vengeance or Spite. And I do think when you're in a leadership position, you know, things go wrong, it's easy to be irritated with folks, especially when you think you've given a very clear order and people haven't followed through or something goes wrong. I think it's easy to have that gut human reaction of being upset or bothered, but I think this is actually kind of a good, just a good point. And I think it works not just in leadership, maybe in your own personal relationships, but the idea that you can vent out your anger and frustration.

You know, type it all up in a Word document that you delete or you write it all down in the notebook that you put back in your drawer. And get those thoughts and feelings out, and organize yourself to actually have the conversation with your subordinates. And you can be clearheaded and not volatile and not reactive, because

I do think that that's where people can kind of get themselves in trouble is, you know, that gut instinct, that gut reaction when that's maybe not the most appropriate way to handle it at the leadership level, especially with your more junior folks.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Yeah, I can't tell you how many times in my career when writing out an e-mail to someone, or even could be the ONS entry, which I've had to write it multiple times throughout my career, and writing it out gave me no choice but to actually think through my understanding of that topic. And it usually caused me to pause and consider whether I really had a command of that particular topic.

So I think that this is, this is one of the, and I did not know that about Lincoln by the way, that was another point that I learned here about all of those letters that he wrote. And I don't, unfortunately my notes, I didn't write it down, but not only did he have a cubbyhole for them, but I think he would even write on the envelope. He would have like some pithy phrase [laughter] that he would put on there and say, follow it up with and not send. So that was kind of a remarkable thing to learn about hi. But absolutely something that we can apply in our daily lives.

CAPT DAVIS:

And I think so, again, in a similar vein, when it comes to communication and clarity, one of the chapters is called Be Decisive and Set Goals. And I think that, again, all of this is sort of interwoven together.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Right. Kind of getting now into this his leadership style.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yep, into his leadership style. And I, what I thought was really interesting about Lincoln was that he came in and he had, he knew what he wanted. He knew, he went in and he knew that he wanted to keep the union together. And that was his goal. That was his vision. And

everything he did, all the decisions that he made during his presidency were aiming at that goal. But it was so interesting because Lincoln was an attorney. You know, he's one of us, and he's a politician. And he was not a master strategist. He was not an Army general. He was not a military guy.

LT COL GARTLAND:

He had no military background.

CAPT DAVIS:

He had no military background.

LT COL GARTLAND:

No executive leadership background, as the author points out.

CAPT DAVIS:

And it's so interesting to me that even though he didn't necessarily have expertise, he hired people who he knew did have expertise, and then he trusted them a lot of times to do the job. But he also knew and communicated to them exactly what he wanted.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Repeatedly.

CAPT DAVIS:

Repeatedly. So he knew, even though he wasn't, you know, he had no military strategy background. I don't think he read Clausewitz, right? But he still knew that the way to win the war would be aggressive battles. And that was one of his biggest frustrations with his generals was a lot of them were kind of nervous and like, you know, kind of pussyfooted around a little bit, and wouldn't, actually all the did was training.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Hesitant. Sure. I mean, they were reluctant. You know, as Ken Burns really masterfully illustrates, and in that PBS series they were simply unwilling to commit to the carnage that was required for victory, which of course, here from the comfort of our podcast room on the second floor of AFJAGS is easy for me to say.

CAPT DAVIS:

Right.

LT COL GARTLAND:

But that was absolutely what was required. And he churned through quite a few generals to get to that point, in fact there is even a graph. Phillips has a couple of really, I think, informative graphs in the book, and one of them is referred to as Lincoln's Parade of Generals [laughter]. And it lays out over the roughly four or five year period of the Civil War, about ten or so generals in a timeline showing how long they served and in what capacities.

And there were quite a few who he, this was part of his leadership style since we're on that topic now, quite a few of them from whom he removed, strategically removed duties in an attempt to number one, rectify the situation and number two, maybe insinuate to them that he needed something different from them. And then sometimes he just outright fired other people who didn't really return in any meaningful capacity.

And then there were others who had their duties removed, but were placed in an alternate capacity, which maximize their capabilities and minimize their flaws. I don't have here in my notes, but there was one of them who wound up, I think, he became his Chief of Staff. If I don't, if I have that right. And served really capably in that position, but was not satisfactory at all, at least in Lincoln's opinion, out on the battlefield.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes. And I think, though, what really made Lincoln a good leader in the sense was he knew what he wanted. He communicated that and he gave his people the opportunity to follow through. So he made a point of saying that his generals could make decisions, but he would always make policy. And I thought that was really interesting because even though in some aspects, it does kind of seem like Lincoln maybe was a little bit of a micromanager to an extent—he did just like show up in people's offices to sit down and talk to them. And he would hand them letters outlining his expectations.

At the same time, his overall policy was, you know, aggressive war fighting and then he would give the generals and you get the people who worked for him the reins and he would say, okay, go forth. I have faith in you that you will do what I need you to.

And he really gave people the opportunity. He promoted people who maybe were a little squishy about whether or not they were doing a good job, because he thought it would be effective to put them in a role where maybe they had more authority, then maybe they would live up to the position he put them in. And then he didn't—he was not someone who was out to humiliate or degrade anybody who worked for him. He truly, it seems like he truly looked for what were people's strengths and what did he think was their potential and he tried to put them in positions where they could utilize both.

LT COL GARTLAND:

And tried not to be directive with them. On most occasions he would make suggestions.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes, he was like persuasive in his suggestions.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Recommendations and would bear with them for as long as he could. Of course, under the time constraints that he was facing at the time. That's a great example. And in fact, there's even a chapter here which we probably won't have time to get into. But it was called Be a Master of Paradox, which shows both sides of the coin of Lincoln.

On the one hand, right, you can show up uninvited at any given moment at a subordinate's office, and then, and really get into the weeds of what was going on with them, right? Sitting at the War Department and the telegraph office that he would have the most recent information to act upon, but then on the other hand, he could be a master delegator. And when he found the people who he trusted, Grant would have been one example. Sherman was another example that we see in the book. He would give them free rein.

He even explicitly told, I think it was, I don't recall if it was Sherman, but one of them toward the end of the Civil War, they essentially asked is "I think that I can finish, in effect"; right, I'm obviously paraphrasing here. "In effect, we can finish off this war if I can pursue so and so, do I have permission to proceed?" And Lincoln essentially writes back immediately, "By all means." Again, paraphrasing, "Please proceed. You don't you don't need my authority there."

CAPT DAVIS:

Yeah. And so one of the other things I want to talk about, I think that ties in, is the idea of leading by being led by your folks. And that was a big thing that Lincoln did, where he gave credit for the things that his folks did that was, that were good. And then he took the blame for things that didn't work out the way that people wanted them to, especially publicly he did this. And I think that is really, that kind of goes into the whole, kind of the myth of Lincoln, that humility aspect and that human aspect. He was just, I think even though, even history has shown, he was just a nice guy, but, you know, he was like, he didn't want anybody executed throughout the entirety of the war. He pardoned everybody.

LT COL GARTLAND:

But I think there was even a blanket rule. I read at one point, no one under, was it under 16?

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes. Not a single child, which

LT COL GARTLAND:

Right, [laughter] another one of those that by today's standards, right? I mean it seems all of those were, those were the realities of the time.

CAPT DAVIS:

Right. And I thought it was so interesting because he really gave people some input on what his goals were, what the overall policy was. And he let them run with it. And he let them run with it until it would really hit the point where he felt like they absolutely were not going to accomplish what he needed. And he gave people the

time that he, I mean under the time constraints he had of war, and a four year term presidency, he gave people time to act on stuff.

And he didn't, you know, he didn't micromanage them to a certain extent. But he also kind of harkening back to stuff we're talking about before, he got out there and he went to visit them on site, and he got a better picture for himself of what this stuff looked like and what the situation was. And that gave him a better sense to of what his people were accomplishing and what they weren't.

LT COL GARTLAND:

He really had an uncanny ability for taking the best from everyone and forgiving the lapses. So it's interesting that because you mentioned a couple of minutes ago, you mentioned that he took all of that, that storytelling ability that he had, that he took from his father. And interestingly, in the introduction, it points out because in a, it's a real juxtaposition to the rest of the book, because over and over and over again, we see Lincoln literally pardoning as in pardoning people who have been convicted, excusing lapses and defects and moving on and not holding personal animosities against people.

And YET, and this was another thing that I learned about Lincoln that I thought was fascinating. He took what in his opinion, was the best from his father and obviously used it to great effect. And yet was completely estranged from him. And pointed out, I thought this was this was really something else to me. He didn't show up at his father's funeral, which is really quite, in fact, it almost seems to be one of the only examples in the book of Lincoln holding a grudge. And I don't know much about that. I don't recall from some of the biographies that I've perused of Lincoln what really was going on there psychologically. But nonetheless, he was able to extract from him what, you know, what he felt was a value and used it to great effect. I think that Phillips crystallized this. This was in chapter 11.

This is again, Phillips has all of these pithy takeaways. So I'll give a quote here from chapter 11. He said, "Lincoln," excuse me, "Those subordinates who will take risks, act without taking direction and ask for responsibility, should be treated as your most prized possessions. And when you finally find one that is a Grant, a General Grant, they tend to multiply as in they turn they in turn delegated to similarly capable people." So Lincoln did that over and over and over again throughout the Civil War, trying to capitalize on the strengths or the perceived strengths of his subordinates.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yeah. And I think what's so interesting is because he was kind of a nice guy and he wasn't a reactive guy. You're, he again, he had all these guys, the guys who ran against him for president are the guys he hired to work for him. And he was an understanding person. And because he didn't go off the handle, because he didn't just fire people, people felt more confident, I think, taking risks under his leadership and making, and they were more confident to make their own decisions. You know, he gave them enough guidance that I think it was clear what the expectations were, but he let them take it and run with it. I think he also knew, I mean, he was the President of the United States. He can only do so much micromanaging anyway. But I think that was really one of his strengths. I think, I thought that was such an interesting leadership perspective, was if your folks aren't afraid of you, they are probably more willing to go out and try things and take risks and make mistakes because they're not afraid to come back and tell you that they goofed.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Lincoln is really the, and I see Charlie is going to make a point here. I'm just going to say briefly, he comes across in this book as the anti-Machiavelli, almost, right? Machiavelli said it is better to be feared than to be loved. And Lincoln really succeeded. Maybe not so much by being loved, but by certainly being a person who had a personal connection with individuals, had a

genuine interest in them, and was willing to overlook the pettiness of wanting to take credit, as you mentioned before, or any personal gripes that might have existed in the past.

CAPT HEDDEN:

Yeah. One of the anecdotes that was in the book that I read, that may well have been in yours, too, that kind of captures a lot of this for me was when he dispatched a Presidential Order to his Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, and got word back that “Not only did Secretary Stanton say he’s not going to do this, Mr. President, he called you a damn fool. Not once, but twice.” [laughter] And President Lincoln’s response was, “Well, Stanton, he’s good about speaking his mind and he’s usually right. So if he says, I’m a damn fool, I must be a damn fool. Let me go talk to him and find out why.” And he just, he had, there was just not an ounce of that political defensiveness or ego that got in the way of this. His gut reaction to being told that by his Secretary of War was, “Well, I must be. Let me go find out why.” And I think that kind of humility and trust in his people, freed them up to speak their mind, and also let him identify the people around him who were really capable and principled. And were going to do what they really thought was right. And were going to tell him what they really thought.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Absolutely. And I think Phillips really succeeds in showing that genuine affability that he had, that this was really who Lincoln was, as testified to, really by the outpouring, the incredible outpouring of grief and support after his assassination.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes. And I think that kind of takes us to the last point. And this I wanted to talk about, because I do think it’s, Lincoln’s personality is a big part of his leadership. And obviously people are who they are. So this isn’t necessarily something that is something you can take away, because you can’t change who you are, right? We all cannot be Lincoln. But he really was an honest person.

He was a straight-shooter and he had a lot of integrity. And he was respected by everybody who worked with him. Even after his death. Even when he had political opposition, who lost out to him, because he was not the front runner, right? It was only the split in the Republican Party

LT COL GARTLAND:

Right.

CAPT DAVIS:

And the Democrats that allowed him to rise up the way that he did. At the same time, people who even had some impressions or opinions about him, right.? He was kind of frumpy. He was visually not much to look at. He had really, apparently a very high pitched, carrying voice.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Right. I did not know that until I read this book.

CAPT DAVIS:

No. That apparently carried well over a crowd. Does not sound like it would be very appealing to listen to. But I guess in the days without microphones, that is probably an asset because crowds of thousands of people can still hear you.

LT COL GARTLAND:

For seven hours.

CAPT DAVIS:

For seven hours.

LT COL GARTLAND:

As in the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes. But he really was, I think, at the heart of it, he might not have, you know, again, he’s not a President who we’ve canceled yet, I guess. But he really was somebody who people genuinely respected. And I think a big part of that was his, he would just somebody with integrity.

You know when the South surrendered at the end of the war. You know, they were willing to sit down in essentially a conference room with Lincoln and surrender. And one of them, I think in part of the book, one of them says, “Well, we knew that you didn’t execute anybody. So we felt pretty safe in coming to this meeting.”

LT COL GARTLAND:

Yes, telling moment. I remember reading that.

CAPT DAVIS:

And Lincoln even played—what was what was the song he played? He played Dixie.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Dixie.

CAPT DAVIS:

He played Dixie that day. And it was because he was so—honestly, I think maybe it was successful and we got where we were because people knew that Lincoln was like an honest, straight shooter kind of guy. And they knew that he’d operated that way throughout the whole war. And that if they showed up to this meeting, he wasn’t going to march them all out into the square and shoot them. Right? He played Dixie. He played like a, all right, we settled this. Let’s all shake hands and figure out where we go from here. And I think that is just so remarkable of him as a person and that not necessarily leadership that you can emulate in the sense of, you know, that’s just his personality. I think he genuinely was just a nice guy.

But I do think, you know, being clear and being honest with people and being a straight shooter and having integrity and owning up to mistakes—I think really does, at the heart of it, is what makes a good leader. And I think that, that’s a really big thing to take away. If you wanted to truly know what made Abraham Lincoln a good leader, I think that’s really at the heart of it, was just partly personality, also partly because he was an honest broker.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Yeah, absolutely. You know, it’s funny that you say he hasn’t been canceled. And I think that’s a big part of it. And this book really succeeds, I mean Lincoln’s humanity shines through in this book. And that’s, I think, one reason why people have a hard time—have a hard time turning in him into a pariah from the vantage point of retrospect, right? In historical analysis, because we really see him striving here to do the best he could, and to just try and genuinely be a good person.

TAKEAWAYS

CAPT DAVIS:

Yeah. So any overall thoughts gents?

LT COL GARTLAND:

Absolutely. Charlie, yeah. Go ahead.

CAPT HEDDEN:

Yeah, I’ll just say, I think my overall takeaway from this project right now, was just the kind of conviction that this all happened. This was all possible. Yeah, he was a good leader. And he communicated well, and he did all of these kind of very practical things that we’ve talked about. But all of that was a was a product and a function and a outcropping of his principles that he had held from the get-go.

And one of those driving principles was that slavery was wrong. I think it took him, you know, clearly took him decades to figure out and to get into a place to really do everything he wanted to do. If I don’t even know if he did everything you wanted to do with that, but as much as he possibly could to rectify that. But that driving force behind so much of his decision making, that coupled with the fact that slavery is wrong, but the Union is right, and the existence of this Union is something that we have to have to be willing to fight for.

Those were just kind of these cornerstones that he just built everything else around, and that led to, that coupled with his just remarkable abilities and personality

led to, I think, who he is in our in our minds and who a president that we can still look back to some what 150, 160 years later and really learn a lot from him and try to emulate in every way that we can.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Yeah, absolutely. So I'd say in takeaways and there's a lot. The book's literally built on takeaway principles, right? I mean, it's just so the audience knows every chapter essentially ends with a couple of bullet points and something we can all relate to in the military [laughter] on the key points from the chapter. But here I guess would be my two takeaways from the book.

And you mentioned this, Erin, that it's he didn't have a lot of the characteristics or the track record that we would associate with great leadership, right? You mentioned that he was kind of ungainly in appearance. He wore these drab black clothes that were ill-fitting, which wasn't entirely surprising because he was six foot four, which back then, I mean, even by present standards, I mean very tall man. And he probably had a hard time finding clothes that could fit. So who knows? But he had the shrill voice. And he had had no executive leadership positions, which honestly leads me in a sense to rethink the entire model that we have for military progression.

The way at least gives you pause on it, because, of course, this isn't just the JAG Corps model. This is the entire military model—is that great leaders come from previously being great leaders. And you continue throughout your leadership career, right, your military career moving from one great leadership success to the next great leadership success. And great leaders have to have that track record of past great leadership.

And yet here we have the man who was able to bring us through the greatest constitutional crisis and military crisis in the nation's history, at that point, with absolutely no track record of leadership other than it does mention that he had one. It seemed like it was a ceremonial position in the Illinois militia. I believe it wasn't. It was mentioned that it was an elected position,

and then, of course, he had he had served one term as a congressman, right? So no *executive* military leadership.

So I think one of the takeaways is greatness can really come from unexpected places, right? From even this ungainly, you know, country lawyer, who came, right? I mean, we all know the whole mythology, right? I mean, rooted ultimately rooted in fact of the log cabin, for instance, and yet rising to greatness. And a lot of people would have never expected it. So that's one takeaway.

Last one would be that Lincoln had really just had this masterful technique of, you know, what I would call monitored delegation. He delegated a lot, but he was always superintending what was happening. He was there at the telegraph office to get the latest info. But at the same time, so another one of these paradoxes, he would give the subordinates who he trusted and even the unproven ones, a lot of opportunity to prove themselves. But then he wasn't, to your point on being decisive, he wasn't afraid to fire people, right? And I mean, we've seen that, we see this obviously in our military careers all the time, right? Commanders get fired. SJAs get fired. No, no, reason to mention names [laughter], although that would make this the highest rated podcast in Air Force history [laughter]. But I'll refrain. Go ahead, Erin.

CAPT DAVIS:

So, yeah, I think I really that's the final thought I have is, you know, speaking of, you know, leadership coming from anywhere, you know, we have our JAG school. We have what we call the Lowry Award. And that goes to the JASOCer who exemplifies the best leadership in that particular class. And the idea isn't that it automatically goes to whoever is the class leader by virtue of rank. It's supposed to go to the student who really exemplified leadership. And I think it is it really can come from anywhere, and it can come from places where it's unexpected. It, you know, you can have a major who is, you know, your class leader and has had tons of military experience and, you know, cross-trained over. And then you can have a lieutenant who's coming from, for us a

law firm, where the only person that they ever led before was a paralegal, you know, who happened to work with them. And they could show up and be an amazing leader. So I do think, you know, we do a lot of training on leadership. You know, we have SOS, ACSC, Air War College. We talk a lot about this in a lot of different ways. And just, I think it just goes to show you that leadership can really arise, sometimes it's when people are put in a position they can rise to the occasion.

And I think what's really interesting, this is really my final thought, was that Lincoln made a comment that the Fathers of the American Revolution, the Fathers of the country had been the last true people who are capable of being like American heroes—that they were the ones who were the last great men of America and that they had this moment of true glory that was not achievable in his time.

And it's stunning to think that he thought that and told people that, knowing what we know about his accomplishments, and what has happened since then. And I think that just goes to show that, you know, we're talking here, you know, captains, lieutenant colonels, we're JAGs, we aren't even in real leadership positions in terms of command, you know, you can be a squadron commander, you could be a group or a wing commander. You never know when your time will come. And you never know when an important turning point is in your life, in the life of the country, you know, how you can affect other people's lives. So for me, the takeaway is you're never, you know, this is all it's all Lincoln. He's a president. There's a big statue of him, right? You can just go look out in D.C. But he was a regular person. He was a regular person who thought that there was no opportunity to become anyone great anymore. And that could be anybody. I think and that I think, for me that is the big takeaway.

LT COL GARTLAND:

And therein lies his greatness.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yeah.

LT COL GARTLAND:

Bottom line, from my standpoint here, a lot of wisdom in this book definitely worth the read and highly recommend it.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yeah.

LT COL GARTLAND:

It's been an awesome podcast. I hope you invite me back.

CAPT DAVIS:

Yes sir. Thanks for joining us.

CAPT HEDDEN:

Thank you for listening to another episode of The Air Force Judge Advocate General's School Podcast. One of the best ways you can support this publication is by following or subscribing the show and leaving us a rating. You can find this episode, transcription, and show notes at www.jagreporter.af.mil/podcasts. We welcome your feedback.

DISCLAIMER:

Nothing from this show should be construed as legal advice. Please consult an attorney for any legal issues. Nothing in this show is endorsed by the federal government, the Air Force, or any of its components. All content and opinions are those of its guests and hosts.

[Music: Band playing clip of Air Force song]

GLOSSARY

- **ACSC:** Air Command and Staff College
- **AFJAGS:** Air Force Judge Advocate General's School
- **JAG:** judge advocate general
- **JASOC:** Judge Advocate Staff Officer Course
- **LOR:** Letter of Reprimand
- **ONS:** Online News Service
- **SJA:** Staff Judge Advocate
- **SOS:** Squadron Officer School