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Tazewell County Board

Continuing a Family Tradition of Community Service

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August ASO Magazine Column **Real Leadership**

First off, I want to apologize for not writing for you last month. My wife and I were blessed with the birth of our first child, Christian John Ackerman, on May 22nd. As such, we were (and still are) busy adjusting our lives and I did not give myself enough time to sit down and write. I appreciate this opportunity to write for you each month and for the many of you that read this column and publication each and every month. With that said, here is this month's column...

General Stanley McChrystal was born the son of a General, growing up in the Army he would later serve in. He entered West Point in 1972, when service to ones country was at an all time low. He went into the Special Forces in 1986. He was a key leader in the Gulf War and finally served as the Commander of all Military Forces in Afghanistan. How does the career of this outstanding citizen of the United States end? Dismissed by his Commander-In-Chief for off-the-cuff remarks made towards his authority.

Agree or not with his remarks in the July Rolling Stones Magazine News Story written by Michael Hastings, who traveled with the General for many months getting material, we all know the result. We read about what was going to or not going to happen in this hyped up controversy for days leading to his meeting with President Obama and his dismissal. During the whole affair, the media was researching examples of this type of wartime dismissal. What they found was Abraham Lincoln dismissing George McClellan. They told us how Lincoln had shown real leadership then and now Obama was doing the same, once again trying as they did during the primary with his speech in Springfield, Illinois, to tie Obama to Lincoln.

Try as they may, they should have done a little more research. They also should have really read the Article written by Michael Hastings. I have done both and want to share with you what I have found. While I do not completely agree with what Michael Hasting wrote, as his opinion is littered throughout the article, I appreciate the great quality of first hand reporting that I must say we are lacking of just what is going on with this war. I suggest if you have not had the opportunity, read the column in Rolling Stones. Now let's look at the difference in Lincoln's and Obama's leadership.

At the onset of the Civil War, one of the most highly touted men in the service was George McClellan. While Lincoln was not as impressed with him as others, he saw the ability McClellan had to train soldiers and knew that this over all other problems was his most pressing. Lincoln also knew that McClellan was a Democrat and already an outspoken critic of many of his policies as President. Still, Lincoln needed a better trained and organized army and McClellan was the best he had at the time.

Over the next two years, the stuff Lincoln had to deal with from McClellan makes this whole affair look silly. McClellan's insubordination towards Lincoln included being quoted by newspapers as saying "The President is an idiot! I only wish to save my country and find the incapables around me will not permit it." One evening, the President went to McClellan's house only to find that he was not at home. Lincoln decided to wait. When McClellan returned from a night of partying with Washington insiders, he

went directly to his room. His servant told Lincoln that he was told to tell the President that “he had gone to bed”. When asked why he allowed such insubordination he said “I would hold McClellan’s horse if it would help win the war.” In another quote to the media, McClellan said of Secretary of War Stanton “Stanton and his cohorts had wanted him defeated and overthrown, so that disunion would prevail and they could be free to rule unhampered in the North.” “They are aware that I have seen through their villainous schemes and that if I succeed my foot will be on their necks,” McClellan said.

Having someone in his command questioning and insulting him was nothing new to Lincoln. Half of his cabinet thought they should have been President and would be doing a better job of it. The list of enemies talking about him to the media was endless. What did Lincoln do?

Lincoln continued to review his staff and let their actions, not their words, determine their status. McClellan would be removed from command, but after the failings of his replacements, he would be placed back in command. Lincoln continued to try and find a way to utilize what was thought to be a talent until it became overly apparent that his talent had been over stated. After failing to pursue Rebel General Robert E. Lee after the battle of Antietam, despite the fact that Lincoln had ordered him to do so first by telegraph, then by messenger, then finally in person himself, Lincoln had no other choice than to remove McClellan for the last time.

While we are currently being told that Obama removing McChrystal took real courage and was an example of strong leadership. The truth is that the lesson of Lincoln’s leadership was the fact that he kept an individual that he personally disagreed with, an individual that had insulted him, in an leadership position in his staff because at that time he appeared to be the best for the job. Winning the war and saving the union was of more importance to Lincoln than his personal reputation. On the other hand, Obama found nothing wrong with McChrystal’s handling of the war; he simple was upset at some of the quotes in the media.

Real leadership is properly utilizing all of the resources at your disposal. Lincoln ignored personal insults and stayed focused on the job at hand. Obama let the political situation at home and not the actions in the field of conflict dictate his response. This Lincoln example is just one of many possible examples; Major General Charles Lee during the Revolutionary War, Major General George Patton during World War II and Major General Douglas MacArthur during World War II and Korea would be some of the most popular other examples.

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