

On December 7, 1862 the Confederate cavalry raider John Hunt Morgan attacked an isolated Union garrison at Hartsville, Tennessee, and captured the entire garrison of almost 2,000 soldiers. Given the recent disaster at the battle of Fredericksburg, this minor embarrassment to National arms ended up causing Abraham Lincoln, and through him his subordinate Army officers, more trouble than other similar setbacks. After poring over maps in the White House on December 8th, a piqued president scolded his senior general, Henry W. Halleck, What on earth an isolated Brigade was doing there I cannot conceive (Basler, V, 545). Soon, a harried Major General William S. Rosecrans was defending his own actions to Halleck, while placing responsibility for the disaster on the feeble resistance offered by the on-site commander, Colonel Absalom B. Moore. Ultimately, Moore bore responsibility for the disaster, although Hallecks attempt to have him cashiered was disapproved. The unfortunate Colonel resigned his commission for medical reasons a few months later.

Like a bad penny, the Hartsville debacle turned up to annoy Lincoln again two weeks later. To Secretary of War Edwin Stanton he writes:

Executive Mansion

Washington, December 26, 1862.

Hon. Sec. of War:

Sir:

Two Ohio regiments and one Illinois regiment were captured at Hartsville, have been paroled, and are now at Columbus Ohio. This brings the Ohio regiments substantially to their homes. I am strongly impressed with the belief that the Illinois regiment better be sent to Illinois, where it will be recruited and put in good condition, by the time they are exchanged, so as to re-enter the service. They did not misbehave, as I am satisfied; so they should receive no treatment, nor have anything withheld from them, by way of punishment.

Yours truly,

Lincoln

(Basler, VI, 20).

The 104th Illinois Volunteer Infantry regiment was quickly transferred to the parole camp at Camp Douglas in Chicago, Illinois. Other events involving recently recruited Illinois regiments shed light on the last sentence of Lincoln's message. Partially as a result of Lincoln's pending Emancipation Proclamation large numbers of recently recruited Illinois soldiers, disillusioned by the changing war aims, deserted their regiments. Lincoln hastens to mention that the Ottawas 104th did not misbehave, possibly wishing to defend the reputation of his state. This Lincoln document contains more historically significant information than most others that have been on the market. The paper has a single vertical fold that tears slightly at the top and bottom. There are four other light tears at the margins, one of which lightly mars the A in his signature, and two others that lightly mar the closing salutation. The writing is bold, and while the signature is crowded to the bottom and right, it is clean and readable.

Morgan, John Hunt (Brig. Gen. CSA; killed Sept. 1864 in Greenville, TN) War-date Clip
Signature, Your Obdt. Svt. / Jno. H. Morgan / Col Comd Brig in pencil. 3 x 1-1/2