

Joan Cummins: Every day at President Lincoln's Cottage, we engage with visitors in conversation on difficult topics, from slavery, to grief, to immigration. Visitors, young and old alike, come here from next door and from around the globe.

Callie Hawkins: And occasionally, we get asked a question on a tour that stops us in our tracks - one we wish we could spend a half hour answering. Some of these questions, on their face, were innocent or simple, but on a second look they contain a level of complexity that leaves us wanting to know more. Each episode, we'll investigate the single real question a visitor has asked us here.

JC: At President Lincoln's Cottage, we're storytellers, historians, and truth seekers, so we called on people whose expertise could speak to all the facets of these questions.

CH: I'm Callie Hawkins

JC: And I'm Joan Cummins. This is Q & Abe. Come on down the rabbit hole with us!

CH: Let's take that half hour now. For this episode, we're exploring the question "Why are there no pictures of Lincoln in his military uniform?"

JC: I was asked this question by a visitor from Belarus, and initially I was pretty confused by the question because I don't think of Lincoln as being "in the military." After a moment though, I realized - this visitor, coming from an Eastern European context, was expecting the president, as the commander in chief to have a military rank like general in addition to being the president. I was then able to tell him that, in the United States, it's a principle of our democracy that the military is under civilian control. Which meant, Lincoln was a civilian as president and didn't have a military uniform. But, I had so taken that principle for granted that it hadn't occurred to me to think about how or why we got there.

CH: That's where we started in working to answer this question: where did this principle come from? We had a sense that it was rooted in the Constitution, so we went to talk to Julie Silverbrook, the Executive Director of The Constitutional Sources Project, to help us track down exactly where in the document it comes from, and what the creators' intentions might have been.

Julie Silverbrook: Yea so the Framers of the US Constitution really did want to work to ensure that the military would be under civilian control, and as I alluded to before this was based in part on the European experience and the decision of the Framers to not emulate that experience. When the Constitution was drafted in 1787, the colonies had just fought a war for freedom from Great Britain, the king controlled the British military, and the Framers really didn't have any interest in duplicating that system. In fact one of the Declaration of Independence's grievances against King George III was that his government had rendered the military independent of and superior to the civil power. Earlier in 1776, when Virginia wrote its Declaration of Rights, they emphasized the primacy of civilian control of the military as well. In that document it says, "in all cases the military should be under strict subordination to, and governed by, the civil power." When the Framers actually wrote the Constitution in 1787, they separated the responsibilities for the military, placing the responsibilities firmly in the civilian hands in two branches of the US government. In Article I Section 8 of the Constitution, it is provided that

Congress shall have the power to "raise and support armies, and to provide and maintain a navy." In addition, Congress has to provide for the state militias when they are called to federal service, and Congress has the power to declare war, and to make the rules for governing the military. Article II Section 2 states that "The President shall be the commander in chief of the army and navy of the United States and the militia of the several states when called into the actual service of the United States." So the Framers spread responsibilities for the military around - the President and Congress have to work together to use the military.

JC: As the US military expanded, additional legislation has made civilian control over the military more specific, Julie says. The National Security Act of 1947 made sure the Defense Department would be civilian-led, and at present, a person has to be out of the military for seven years before they can hold one of these offices.

CH: Interestingly, these changes also spring from an effort to avoid the experiences of Europe.

JS: This legislation was passed in the wake of World War II and in the lead up of the Cold War period and was motivated in part again by the European experience, wanting to take a departure from the European experience. Even though there was a much larger army, standing army, in the post- World War II context, they really wanted to emphasize civilian control so that there wouldn't be a temptation towards militarization and possibly despotism that was experienced in Germany and Japan, and something that the United States and the western order had to confront during World War II.

CH: So, it's true the civilian control of the military is written into the Constitution, but it's also a principle that's been developed and reinforced over time.

JC: We also felt like we needed to know more about how people think critically about the relationship between civilians and the military in the present day context. What kinds of things do current scholars consider? How does the U. S. compare in an international context? We brought in Alice Hunt Friend, who works with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and with American University, to help us out.

Alice Hunt Friend: And it's one of the great strengths of the United States that we really made that term of the profession of arms. If you are a professional in the military, and our military is a professional military, that is one of the main principles of your profession, is that you are subordinated to democratic control of the armed forces. That's said, in reality there's always tension and friction and disagreement about what the role of the civilian is vis-a-vis the military and how far military expertise should extend, and how far civilian preferences get to extend into the military. And that's what most of the geeks like me who study civ-mil relations in the U. S. really spend our time on - we don't worry about coups so much here in the United States, in part because we have this really strong tradition of subordination of civilian control.

JC: This kind of blew my mind a little bit, talking to Alice, that no, we, we don't worry about coups in the United States... I've always thought of them as sort of a bad disaster thing that happened somewhere else.

CH: Yeah it reminded me of an article I read not too long ago about the only successful coup in American history, which is actually in Wilmington, North Carolina in the late 1800s, when a group of white supremacists massacred hundreds of African Americans in an effort to take over the port city's multiracial government.

JC: So yeah, a bad disaster thing.

CH: Yeah.

JC: I hadn't realized how strong this principle was, and that was part of where my confusion with the visitor came from, because it felt so automatic to me, that of course civilians would be in control of the military. Julie was able to validate my experience.

JS: Overall I do genuinely believe that the notion of civilian control over the military is so ingrained in our institutions and the American psyche that I don't think it's an overwhelming political concern, and I wouldn't, I wouldn't put it in my top fifty current concerns over at our political system.

JC: Alice was able to tell us what kinds of things are a concern in the civilian military relations field. If we're not worried about coups, what are we worried about instead?

AHF: There's a lot of concern, other countries, of the military itself deciding to intervene in politics. I am way more worried right now about the trends I see about civilians pulling our military into politics. Cause I don't know how you unspool that once you do it. And you know, there's a lot of evidence from other countries about sort of post-coup governments and sort of democratizing after military dictatorships and other, so I suppose there are examples out there - but I would really, really prefer we never ever ever need them.

JC: Yeah.

AHF: And we're not at all close to that today, but we are flirting with a lot of tendencies that could be really problematic if they become persistent trends. So for me as a scholar I always sort of focus back on civilians, and civilians thinking about this relationship as hard as our military counterparts do - because the military thinks about it a lot! It's just the kind of argument that we have to think about the long term consequences and whether or not we can either reverse these choices, or if we can live with them if we can't reverse them.

CH: Alice gave us a couple of examples of what she's talking about here, including when political candidates publish lists of military officers who have endorsed them by way of implying that the entire military is on their side.

JC: The example that immediately comes to mind for me is the conversations around kneeling during the national anthem. That there's a group of people who very much see that as disrespecting the military, or the service of veterans, and have drawn the military in on their side by way of hoping to strengthen their

position. Plenty of the people making that argument are veterans themselves, or have family members in the military, but then you also have veterans who are saying, don't use me to support this argument, I went and fought in the first place to support people's right to protest. Weirdly enough, in Lincoln's time we had some of the shift happening the other way, of the military inserting themselves into civilian politics.

CH: George McClellan, who ran against Lincoln for president in 1864, distributed campaign posters featuring him in his uniform as general in the Union Army, and he was still actively serving as he campaigned for president and didn't resign his commission until Election Day.

JC: Don't worry everybody, Lincoln won the election.

CH: Yeah, and historians pretty much agree that that McClellan would have been a terrible president.

JC: But, even during Lincoln's first term, there were concerns about his presidency. One of the things that worries people about the prospect of the military getting involved in politics is that the military holds so much power. Their job is to exercise power through violence, or the threat of it, and that power entering the political stage can be scary. Lincoln as president oversaw some of the most ambitious and unprecedented expansions of executive power, which people also found scary.

CH: Most famously, Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus, which allowed him to indefinitely detain Confederate sympathizers in Maryland. But also, the Emancipation Proclamation would probably be today called an executive order. Lincoln unilaterally liquidated millions of dollars of property bound up in the act of owning other people. Many found that frightening, and many others were thrilled.

JC: But did Lincoln's expansions of power in this way extend to the civil military dynamic? As commander in chief he was pretty involved even in operations and tactics, the small details of the war. Alice says, traditionally this kind of thing is supposed to be outside the bounds of civilian control. Nevertheless, she admires the way Lincoln handled it.

AHF: You know, when you, when you just think about the pure, the ability to connect the political level strategy to the military campaign, and then all the way to military operations and tactics, you know, Lincoln just had that one figured out. And he figured it out fairly early on. And a big part of that is what today we would call micromanagement. [laughter]

JC: Yeah...

AHF: Which has a very bad rap! And I was reflecting on this earlier, and I think there's a really important distinction between micromanagement, which indeed can be very unhealthy, and oversight, and accountability, right? And I think Lincoln was really great at accountability. The rap is that he like lived in the telegraph office, and he got daily reports from the front, and he visited the front many times.

CH: Well and one of the great stories of about his time here at the Cottage was his daily commute. Yeah! You know, and he used that time to stop and talk to soldiers, you know, in hospitals or on their way to,

to battle, the contraband camps, you know, he used that time to hear more about what was actually happening at the front, so that...

AHF: Yeah, and he, he got information from his corps commanders, he sort of went up and down the chain of command to get the real story, and he - but then he was transmitting his orders through the chain of command hierarchically, the way it's supposed to work, right? And so he was constantly letting his general officers know that he was watching them and he was approving or disapproving of what they were doing, and he was telling them what to do in an operational sense, but he was telling them, he wasn't telling their captains, right? And that's really critical, right - that's the difference between micromanagement, between choosing bombing targets, or trying to talk to folks at like the platoon level, right, and serious oversight and serious accountability of your general officers, and your officer corps in general. And that I think, you know as I sort of review it, that's like another genius of Lincoln, is that he really balances that really well, that idea of accountability without, you know, micromanaging too much. He lets his generals use their strengths and use their expertise, and then fills in all the holes he sees. And he has to keep constant tabs on them to see where the holes are.

CH: Lincoln had no combat military experience, so it might be surprising how successful he was as a commander in chief. We wondered, why do so many see military service as a good pre requisite for the presidency?

JC: Here's Julie.

JS: Many of our past presidents and former and current members of Congress have served admirably in United States military, I think that many of the military's professional values, like courage, honesty, sacrifice, integrity, loyalty, service - these are some of the most respected professional values in human experience. They are undeniably qualities that we hope that our government leaders have, and so I think over time Americans have been attracted to political leaders who do have that military service. Who is more committed to the American system of government than somebody who was willing to put their life on the line to defend our freedom and our system of government? So I think generally previous military service is seen as a good prerequisite. This notion stretches all the way back to George Washington, who is really a singular figure in the American mind. I also think that, as faith in civilian political institutions erodes, the American public does tend to look to the military for the kind of virtuous leadership and stability that they crave. I think it's just really important to explain the sequencing of it, which is this is previous military service, but that previous military experience is not the same thing as having a military leader in charge of both the military itself and over the civilian portions of government.

JC: We wanted to get a perspective on this from folks who have served in the military themselves. We share a grounds with the Armed Forces Retirement Home, and we went over to talk to a group of the veterans who live there. Do you think differently about, or do you respect a president who has military service more than one who doesn't?

John Baker: Absolutely.

Frank Lawrence: Yeah.

JC: How come?

Jim Diamond: Just as sure as there's cows in Texas, and I know Texas is full of heifers.

Frank Lawrence: Yeah.

JD: We, we'd much prefer that people at that, at that place should be some type of military service. Because you don't realize what you're doing when you send fifty eight thousand young kids - and the average age, you know what the average age of the Vietnam was? What d'you think it was?

JC: Nineteen, I think?

JD: You right. You right. And in World War II it was twenty three.

FL: Yeah.

JD: So these are children. Babies! They didn't even - they didn't know nothing! So a person who is responsible for sending you over there should have some experience in that so he understands what it does to the families back there –

FL: Yeah.

JD: Mother's children that are being killed like that.

JC: That's Retired Staff Sergeant Jim Diamond. Earlier in that excerpt you heard Retired Corporal John Baker, and you'll also hear from Retired Master sergeant Frank Lawrence later in the show.

CH: We also wanted to know how folks who'd served felt about their uniforms. Did it feel significant to put it on for the first time? We thought it might have felt important or empowering, but our veteran guests had a completely different recollection.

JD: Yeah, oh yeah... That same night, cause we got in that evening like, about the train left uh... I guess it must have been about 4 o'clock, 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and we probably got in like about 11:30, 12 o'clock we got into the base. We first gotta transfer, they picked us up in buses and took us to the base. We was up all night, and while we were going through there, the guy hand you this great big bag that we learned later was called a duffel bag. [laughter] And you come along, the guy, [rustles] hup, into the bag, shoot hup, into the bag, when you get through you got this great big bag you lookin around. You knew that was the uniform.

FL: Yeah.

JD: We hadn't put it on yet.

FL: Yeah.

JD: When you woke up the next morning it had toothpaste in there, shaving cream.

FL: Oh yeah.

JD: It had everything. You was ready to go.

FL: Yeah. It was all issued by the quartermaster.

JD: That's right.

FL: Well I, see, we were still under that when I went in. And, ah, we had the same uniform. And them one piece for things was the most horrible thing I ever wore, they were coveralls like a mechanic wears in a garage.

JD: Nothing didn't fit.

JB: Well, I'm not like these gentlemen here, I was a draftee. In the army, each base has a specialty for training troops. And then they give you a little uniform that tells you what branch it is. It was in the summertime, and the uniform was different in the summertime. This is winter, and the only thing it lacks is an Eisenhower jacket. But at that time the, the demand for summer uniforms was so great, and they're khaki like this, right? It was so great that they had to, they had to call Sears Roebuck and get enough pants, khaki pants, they didn't have enough of the issue pants. So I felt kind of self-conscious on the base there with my Sears & Roebuck khaki pants where the other boys had their GI stuff, but they finally gave us the right kind after several months. So that's, that's how I was issued my uniform, in much the same procedure as they.

JC: Do you think people would have taken Lincoln more seriously if he were wearing a military uniform?

CH: I don't - no, probably not... you know, there is an image of Lincoln in 1847 that really looks like Mary may have gotten to him before he sat for it because it's, his hair is all smoothed out and he just looks kind of awkward, and I can imagine that same kind of scene, or that same kind of image, with him in a uniform, it just doesn't seem to fit quite right.

JC: I don't think the uniform would fit him quite right, I haven't seen him really in any pictures where his clothes look like they really super fit well, because he's sort of a lean, gawky kind of dude. And for me, having a leader in that context who like insists on being seen in their military uniform is an indication to me that they're - they don't actually have any power, because they're worried about whether or not people see them as powerful, and they're using the military uniform as a way of showing that off.

CH: Yeah, I do think that image was something that the Lincolns, especially Mrs. Lincoln, was hyper aware of though, and I do think that perhaps she thought that if, if Lincoln's image was improved a little

bit maybe, or if, if his physical image was improved, that their image as the, the First Family might be improved a little. I think she was hyper aware of being the First Family from the frontier and being seen as sort of country bumpkins.

JC: And it's true that people treat you differently based on the way you physically appear.

CH: Absolutely. So I do think that there is an important part of, or an important role that image plays in this question too. So with that in mind, we also spoke with Paul Biegel, whose grandfather painted really striking image of Lincoln in his pajamas, working on the Emancipation Proclamation by his bedside, glasses on, and one slipper dangling off of his foot, right here at the Soldier's Home.

Paul Biegel: I am the grandson of Jes Wilhelm Schlaikjer, who was my mother's father, and who was the artist that painted the Abraham Lincoln painting set in the Lincoln Cottage. I saw it for the first time in their attic in Washington, DC with mold and dust on it. It was framed, but everything was very dusty. And I believe I was up in the attic just looking around because my grandmother said, you should go up there and take a look at the dead bats that I swatted last night, and I said, okay, and I went up there and saw this and I asked my mother when I came back down - his daughter - what the heck is that painting? And she described it to me, and showed me the, the articles in the newspaper when it was on display in the Senate Office Building and I thought, that is great, but why is it there collecting dust? So she took it down from there and she, being an artist as well, knew how to restore it, and she made a beautiful again, it was hanging in our home in Chevy Chase until they passed it on to my brother and me, and I currently have possession of it. He began his career in New York City as an illustrator, he wasn't a portrait painter, more or less. He illustrated magazine stories, he also illustrated short stories and I guess what you used to call the pulp fiction books. So, lots of action type scenes, right? You know, poised with a gun or something, it was very interesting. But when he got this job in what was then called the War Department here in Washington, DC, he moved his family down here, and he took up a position to be the painter - I think the head painter - of the inspirational patriotic war posters for recruitment. There's one of an Air Force pilot standing with his head kind of in the clouds holding a bomb, and I think the caption on the poster is "O'er the ramparts we watch," a very, very prestigious looking scene, and so he began to get national acclaim because of that. He had already had that from the covers of those fiction books, but I think that he got the job here in Washington, DC because of his background in painting those covers. I think all I can say is that, Jes himself wanting to always be a person that would do the right thing, do what's right in life, he probably identified with Lincoln, because that's what Lincoln was doing. So that is the reason he depicted him, depicted him in that manner. Very very human-like, you know, not a god, not this leader of the military, but more or less, he is human, and he's got compassion and humility, and his seriousness about what he was doing in that act. And Jes knew that you can be jovial, and you can dance around and have fun in life, but when it comes to trying to do the right thing, you have to be serious. And in that scene you can see the look on Lincoln's face and his concentration, and that's how he was. But in spite of that, he was human and not god like in that he was wearing a night shirt and it was bedtime. And in the photographs from those old days you can see Lincoln struggling you can see it on his face, and maybe even so in my grandfather's painting.

JC: Paul had one more thing to add about his grandfather as he grappled with Parkinson's disease.

PB: Maybe just to emphasize that, more than his hobbies and his professional art, that to me, what he meant to me was someone to follow from a philosophical and approach to life point of view, because of his disease making it terrible suffering for him, seeing that he wanted to take his problem like a gentleman and not burden anybody with it, is what I look up to, and I hope that if I have issues similarly as I get older, then I want to be that way too. I think it's the right way to be.

JC: So while Paul's grandfather had plenty of practice depicting imposing and inspiring military images, his image of Lincoln was different. While most Americans view Lincoln as among our greatest presidents, he didn't - and doesn't - present a very imposing or martial image visually. Instead, he's lean and rugged, maybe pensive or tragic.

CH: Yeah, our veteran guests were in consensus that they'd seen major changes in the way civilians respond to the image of a military uniform, and to the person wearing it. Mr. Baker told us about the shift he's seen in his own lifetime.

JB: Now, the Korean War is called The Forgotten War.

FL: Yeah.

JB: And people back then paid no more attention to a person in uniform than to the man in the moon. And, uh, I guess the reason was that they were just come out of World War II and the soldiers had all come back, and then we had this war in Korea that wasn't a welcome war. We, I mean, we had to answer but with South Korea against the Chinese and, and so it - people weren't sensitive to nor appreciative of soldiers who were in uniform at that time. Now then they can't do enough for the veterans, and I'm reaping the benefits of all that adoration now, but back then it was different. And in World War II there was great respect for the soldiers but in Korea no, but now... And Vietnam was much the same way there was such a division in the country, then.

FL: Yeah.

JB: And so a man in military was respected as much as he is now and I don't understand why that is but that's that's the way it was.

JD: We had to get out of our uniform when we came back.

JB: Now then people come up to people in the service, or us veterans who might be wearing a cap that says Korean veteran, or World War II, or whatever, and say "thank you for your service, thank you for your service," so I think the respect for the military uniform is much greater today than historically.

JC: Today, just as in Lincoln's time the United States is actively, if unofficially, at war. There wasn't a Congressional declaration of war during the Civil War, and there hasn't been one since World War II, yet American troops are deployed in conflict situations abroad as we speak. Alice explained how that's possible under something called the Authorization for the Use of Military Force, or AUMF.

AHF: So the AUMF was passed, I should know how many days, but just a few days after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, and it is I believe sixty words long, it's very short, and it says that the president should use any means necessary to use military force against those who attacked us on 9/11, their - and their affiliates I believe, their affiliates and adherents I think. And so it's a very broad authority given to the president –

JC: Yeah!

AHF: Under duress, extremely quickly after one of the most major attacks on American soil in our history, and it has not really been updated since. Like I said there was sort of one extra AUMF there a couple years later, but the AUMF we talk about has been the AUMF that we have been fighting under, or fighting Al Qaeda under, ever since. And the AUMF has been stretched and expanded, and you need a lawyer to really walk you through this, but it has been used increasingly to target terrorists in places outside of Afghanistan ever since 2001. It has been used to cover activities in Somalia, for example, it has been used in connection with ISIS, which did not exist on 9/11, it has been expanded. The AUMF authorizes war and then Congress never reauthorizes anything since. Not really. Now, there is a National Defense Authorization Act every year, and there has been an overseas contingency operations budget I believe since FY2003, and overseas contingency operations are wars, are "oops unexpected conflict," right, and we need money quick, and we need to be more flexible than it might be in the rest of the NDAA, which is where the 600-plus billion dollars comes from. So you could argue, well the Congress has been authorizing, you know, military activities year on year by funding it, which is what they do under Article I, right? So you can hear this dialogue happening between the President and the Congress. But there's some value, great value I would argue, in the Congress debating on the floors of the Senate and the House whether or not we should continue to deploy US forces to use violence abroad, and for what objectives, and how much are we willing to pay in lives and treasure to continue to do that. And you haven't really gotten that in a long time, and there's a real political and public value to doing that, even if, you know, parsing out the legalese of everything everybody's technically inside the law, that's not really the spirit of things. The spirit of things is the Congress is our representative and they're supposed to decide on behalf of the American people, do we really want to keep using violence abroad for these purposes? Is this worth it to us? Is there - is this the right thing to do? And, and you just haven't had that for real long time.

CH: Lincoln was very conscious that he was living in a time of crisis and I'm impressed that he spent as much time as he did reflecting on the Constitution and the balance of power in the government and thinking carefully about how to use the military.

JS: The Constitution is what sets out the design of our system of government. It's also a reflection of our common values when it comes to questions of, again, democratic institutions, liberty, who we are as a people in the United States. This is a very diverse country, we don't - we are not united by a shared ethnicity or shared faith, we are united by our faith in our founding ideals which are reflected in the Constitution, so I think the Constitution is always going to matter. I think the work that we do to educate people about the Constitution is critical, because you can't value what you don't understand, and what you don't know.

JC: Over the course of looking into this, I definitely have gained a new appreciation for the Constitution and for this principle being part of the protections laid into it. To go back to the visitor who asked me that question, Belarus has had the same president since 1994, and is widely considered to be the last dictatorship in Europe. It's easy to find pictures of the Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, in a military uniform designed to look imposing.

CH: We hear from visitors regularly that the Cottage has given them a greater appreciation for the complexities of democracy. We always hope visitors have a chance to reflect, as Lincoln did, on what they'd like the future of America to look like. What can you do to move towards, as the Constitution says, "a more perfect union?"

JC: This episode was produced by me, Joan Cummins, and Callie Hawkins. Music for Q&Abe was written, performed, and is copyrighted by, Clancy Newman.

CH: Q&Abe is possible thanks to generous supporters of President Lincoln's Cottage. To find out how you can support this podcast and other programming, visit www.lincolncottage.org.

JC: To the Belarusian visitor whose question sparked this episode, best wishes in your own journey of understanding democracy. And, thanks to you all for joining us for season 1 of Q&Abe.

CH: You'll hear from us again with season 2 this winter. Comments or questions in the meantime? Write to us at podcast@lincolncottage.org.

JC: President Lincoln's Cottage is a home for brave ideas. Stay curious!