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Before his Presidency, Lincoln Served in the Illinois Militia During the Black Hawk War

SPRINGFIELD, IL (11/10/2011)(readMedia)-- Before Abraham Lincoln's name became synonymous with the Civil War, he slogged his way around the state during the Black Hawk War as a volunteer Soldier in the Illinois Militia, known today as the Illinois National Guard.

Elected by his peers to the rank of captain, Lincoln will forever be linked to the history of the National Guard, which will celebrate its 375th birthday on Dec. 13. Lincoln is one of 19 Presidents to serve in the National Guard, one of two from Illinois. The other is Ulysses S. Grant, who would go on to command all Union Armies under President Lincoln.

Previously unknown Black Hawk War documents written and signed by Capt. Abraham Lincoln while on duty in 1832, and an affidavit signed by Lincoln in 1855, have recently been discovered at the National Archives in Washington, D.C and their authenticity confirmed by researchers at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) in Springfield, Ill.

"Few documents survive that detail Abraham Lincoln's service as a Company Captain in the 4th Illinois Mounted Volunteers in the 1832 frontier disturbances collectively known as the Black Hawk War," said Daniel Stowell, editor of The Papers of Abraham Lincoln at the ALPLM. "This discovery reminds us that many U.S. presidents, including Lincoln, answered their country's call to duty long before becoming Chief Executive, and that service had a formative

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effect on their future careers. Lincoln always said he was more gratified by being elected an officer by his men than any position he held afterwards."

Private researcher Anne Musella recently brought a previously discovered Certificate of Discharge signed by Lincoln to the attention of Papers of Abraham Lincoln staff who are working at the National Archives Building in downtown Washington. That led Assistant Editor David Gerleman to delve further in the Bounty Land Warrant files at the National Archives where he found two more Certificates of Discharge written and signed by Lincoln.

Together with other documents previously discovered, it appears that Lincoln, like other officers, filled out and signed dozens of these Certificates of Discharge. Given to soldiers as they mustered out to return home, the veterans later submitted these documents as proof of service when they claimed the bounty lands allotted to them by Congress. The certificates located at the National Archives more than double the number of surviving discharge certificates written and signed by Captain Abraham Lincoln, and likely others still await discovery.

Twenty years after the end of the conflict, changes in bounty land laws gave several of Lincoln's company the chance to claim up to 160 acres of federal land. To do so, they had to provide evidence of their service, and so Lincoln was once again called upon to confirm that they had indeed enrolled in his company. An additional document discovered by Gerleman in the Bounty Land Warrant Files was an affidavit signed by Lincoln and Thomas Moffet in 1855 attesting that former First Corporal Charles R. Pierce had honorably served and therefore was entitled to make a land claim.

Like Lincoln's service, Soldiers and Airmen in the Illinois National Guard have protected their communities from during natural disasters and other domestic emergencies, while also answering their nation's call during war and national emergencies. From the communities around the state to the sands of Iraq to the mountains of Afghanistan, the Illinois National Guard has made their mark. The echos of the past live on today in the men and women of the Illinois National Guard, whose Joint Force Headquarters unit patch features a silhouette of Lincoln.