

Wait just a moment

by BRIAN LOCKHART

It was July, 1863, shortly after the Battle of Gettysburg during the American Civil War, when U.S. President Abraham Lincoln wrote a correspondence to General George Meade, army commander, regarding his leadership following the battle.

The Confederate army had been defeated at the Battle of Gettysburg and were on the run. The Confederates were slowed in their retreat by flood waters that stopped them from crossing a river.

The battle itself was a massive event with close to 200,000 soldiers from two armies taking part.

At the end of three days, the casualty figures topped 50,000.

The Union army did not pursue the rebels with much haste. Several minor skirmishes took place, but for the most part, General Meade kept his troops in check.

The battle was a turning point in the war and left the Union army with a great advantage.

In a time when correspondence and communication took days to arrive, and arrived by courier on horseback, instructions to battlefield commanders were delivered by letters and correspondence.

Upon hearing the results of the battle, and what happened afterward, Lincoln was furious. It was his position that Meade should have pursued the fleeing Confederate army, cornered them at the swollen river, and finished them off.

He penned a letter to Meade detailing his disappointment at the General's decision, citing the fact that he still had 20,000 veteran troops, and many more raw recruits that he could have used in the final attack.

Lincoln wrote: "He was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our other late successes, have ended the war. As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely. If you could not safely attack Lee last Monday, how can you possibly do so South of the river, when you can take with you very few more than two thirds of the force you then had in hand? It would be unreasonable to expect, and I do not expect you can now effect much. Your golden opportunity is gone, and I am distressed immeasurably because of it."

The letter was an attack on Meade's ability as a commander and questioned his choices to the point of saying he was incompetent to lead the army.

Then Lincoln did something, which was common for him. He filed the letter away.

A few days later, he re-read the letter, only this time under the light of some sober second thought.

He realized that Meade had just been through three days of a living hell, seeing 25,000 of his own men wounded or dying on the battlefield. The toll on him must have been enormous. It was no wonder he didn't order his troops to attack a fleeing enemy and witness yet another day of bloodshed in what would have been a massacre, with one army almost out of ammunition and their path of escape blocked.

Lincoln wrote a new letter to Meade. Only this time, instead of chastising him for a missed opportunity, he praised him for his success in the main battle.

A sober second thought is something we should practice daily. How often are words thrown around in anger or without that lead to an even greater challenge.

Sports organizations are now urging players, coaches, and parents to follow this rule of thought.

They are urging people to think, before saying something stupid.

Many sports are going through a tough time because of a lack of officials. People are just giving up and don't want do a job where they are verbally abused, or sometimes worse.

This past week, a hockey coach in Nova Scotia was charged after leaving the bench and physically assaulting a referee on the ice. This was during a game for players in the nine- and ten-year-old division.

Not only is he going to be fined, maybe more, and have a record ? this happened in front of a lot of witnesses ? his involvement in hockey will be over. I can't see any league allowing this coach to ever be on the bench ever again.

The ruckus was started after a hit on the ice. One parent in the stands decided to protest the hit by throwing a cowbell on the ice surface. Bad decisions all around.

Taking a moment to think about what you are going to say at the spur of the moment can have a huge impact on the rest of yours, and someone else's day.

Once something is said, you can't take it back.

It's better to be safe, than sorry.