



Introduction

In early 1865, the United States Military Railroad delivered the 1865 equivalent of Air Force One to President Lincoln, a private railroad car. Lincoln never used the railroad car, named "The United States," while he was alive. On April 21, 1865, President Lincoln's body and the body of his son, Willie, left Washington D.C. in "The United States," which had been modified to serve as a funeral car. Over 12 days, "The United States" traveled about 1,600 miles through more than 160 communities, carrying the martyred President back home to Springfield, Illinois. In 12 major cities formal funerals were held, and many more memorial services were organized in communities along the train's route.

Arrangements for the Lincoln funeral train were directed by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton who designated General Edward D. Townsend as his point man for logistics. Townsend accompanied the train back to Springfield. Stanton appointed Ohio Governor John Brough and attorney John W. Garrett to head a "Committee of Arrangements" for the trip home. They immediately issued orders that effectively commandeered use of the railroads from Washington to Springfield for the funeral train which "will not exceed nine cars, including baggage car, and the hearse car..." Biographer and friend Isaac N. Arnold wrote: "Non-commissioned officers of the Veteran Reserve Corps were detailed to act as a body-guard, and major generals of the army were directed to attend the train and keep watch, so that at all times during the journey the coffin should be under their special guardianship." By April 18, they had issued a chronology for the trip, leaving Washington on April 21 and arriving in Springfield, Illinois on May 3. They proposed "the following regulations" to Stanton:

- That the time of the departure and arrival be observed as closely as possible.
- Those material detentions at way points be guarded against as much as practicable, so as not to increase the speed of trains.
- That a pilot engine be kept ten minutes in advance of the train.
- That the special train, in all cases, have the right of road, and that all other trains be kept out of its way.
- That the several railroad companies provide a sufficient number of coaches for the comfortable accommodation of the escort, and a special car for the remains; and that all these, together with the engines, be appropriately draped in mourning.
- That where the running time of any train extends beyond or commences at midnight, not less than two sleeping-cars be added, and a greater number if the road can command them, sufficient for the accommodation of the escort.
- That two officers of the United States Military Railway Service be detailed by you, and dispatched at once over the route to confer with the several railway officers, and make all necessary preparations for carrying out these arrangements promptly and satisfactorily."

"Non-commissioned officers of the Veteran Reserve Corps were detailed to act as a body-guard, and major generals of the army were directed to attend the train and keep watch, so that at all times during the journey the coffin should be under their special guardianship," wrote Lincoln biographer Isaac N. Arnold." Lincoln chronicler Frank W. Z. Barrett wrote: "The train of eight coaches, six for the mourners, one for the guard of honor, and one- the funeral car – draped within and without, sped at last on its way from Washington to Baltimore, its first stopping-place." Another chronicler of the funeral, J. C. Power, wrote: "The hearse car was one that had been built in Alexandria, VA, for the United States military railroads, and was intended for the use of President Lincoln and other officers of the Government when traveling over those roads. It contained a parlor, sitting room and sleeping



apartment, all of which was fitted up in the most approved modern style. The car intended for the family of the President and the Congressional Committee, belonged to the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad Company, ordinarily used by the President and Directors of the company. It was divided into four compartments, thus: Parlor, chamber, dining room and kitchen; with water tanks and gasometer. The whole car was fitted up in the most elegant and costly manner. Both of these cars were richly draped in mourning."

"At six o'clock on the morning of April 21, the members of the Cabinet, Lieutenant General Grant and his staff, several United States Senators, the Illinois delegation, and a considerable number of army officers, arrived at the Capitol and took their farewell view of the face of the departed statesman," wrote J. C. Power, who served for years as custodian of the Lincoln tomb in Springfield. "After an impressive prayer by the Rev. Dr. Gurley, the coffin was borne, without music, to the hearse car, to which the body of his son Willie had previously been removed. Another prayer and the benediction followed."

"At eight o'clock, the Funeral Cortège of Abraham Lincoln moved slowly from the depot, for its long and circuitous journey to the western prairies. Several thousand soldiers were in line by the side of the railroad, and presented arms as the train departed amid the tolling of bells and the uncovered heads of the immense assemblage," wrote Power. "A portion of the soldiers in line near the depot were two regiments of U.S. Colored Troops. They stood with arms reversed, heads bowed, all weeping like children at the loss of a father. Their grief was of such undoubted sincerity as to affect the whole vast multitude. Dignified Governors of States, grave Senators, and scar-worn army officers, who had passed through scenes of blood and carnage unmoved, lost their self control and were melted to tears in the presence of such unaffected sorrow."

What follows is an examination of the funeral train as it weaved its way from Washington, D.C. to Springfield, IL. As students dig into the primary sources (newspapers, photographs, etc.), they will uncover how the nation dealt with its grief from various perspectives.

Abraham Lincoln's funeral train mentions the major stops and only some of the cities through which the train passed. Throughout the long journey, entire populations of rural America were waiting alongside the tracks as the nine car funeral train slowly passed by (the funeral car was the 8th car). For example, officials of Richmond, Indiana, estimated its mourners at 15,000 - a number greater than the city's population - at 3:15 A.M. in the morning! Depending on conditions, the train usually traveled between 5 and 20 M.P.H. Everywhere there were arches draped in black stretched over the tracks.