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5-27-2005

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Repository Citation

Wilkes, Donald E. Jr., "Lincoln Assassinated!, Part 2" (2005). Popular Media. Paper 122. $http://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/fac_pm/122$

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LINCOLN ASSASSINATED!, PART 2

Published in <u>Flagpole Magazine</u>, p. 12 (April 27, 2005). There is a bibliography at the end of the article.

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Fourth, in late March and early April 1865 the Confederate secret services, having abandoned abduction plans, plotted to kill Lincoln (and hopefully his entire Cabinet) by exploding a mine near the White House. This plot to assassinate Lincoln had been personally approved by Jefferson Davis and other top Confederate leaders. The plan failed because the explosives expert from a secret service, the Confederate War Department's Torpedo Bureau (at that time mines were called torpedoes), who had been detailed to detonate the mine, was, while being escorted to Washington, D.C. by Confederate cavalry, unexpectedly captured by Union cavalry on April 10 a mere 15 miles from the District.

In fairness to Jefferson Davis and the other Confederate leaders, it must be noted that the Confederacy's plots to abduct or kill Lincoln originated only after an incident in March 1864 in which Confederate soldiers found concealed papers on the body of a Union cavalry officer, Col. Ulric Dahlgren, who had been killed in combat while leading an unsuccessful raid on Richmond. Those papers strongly suggested that the Union raiders had intended to kill Davis and the members of his cabinet, and to burn down Richmond. The Confederate government published the papers and they were widely distributed in America and Europe. In the resulting uproar Southern newspapers blasted Lincoln and Union leaders as depraved murderers and ferocious criminals and demanded that they be held personally accountable; the *Richmond Examiner*, for example, "insist[ed] upon the most scrupulous carrying out of retaliation for murders, robberies, and other outrages, with the most punctual exactitude." There were indignant howls of execration about this "diabolical plot" that had been devised by "a devilish foe," and editorials openly advocated Lincoln's assassination.

Jefferson Davis and his top officials were convinced, not without reason, that the Dahlgren papers proved that Lincoln had personally approved the murder of the Confederate leadership and the destruction of the Confederate capital, and within weeks of the discovery of the Dahlgren papers the Confederate plot to abduct Lincoln was afoot; and when that plot failed the scheme to blow up Lincoln came into existence. The contents of the Dahlgren papers make it perfectly understandable why Davis and Confederate leaders were now willing to sign on to covert actions against Lincoln. "If Davis … believed Lincoln had contemplated Davis' capture or death,"

William Hanchett has cogently asked, "why should Davis not have contemplated Lincoln's?" The old view that assassination by either the North or the South was unthinkable because assassinations contravened binding moral standards for the gentlemen of the times stands thoroughly disproved.

Fifth, John Wilkes Booth was a Confederate secret services operative. That Booth was probably a Confederate spy has long been strongly suspected. His sister Asia Booth Clarke in her memoir The Unlocked Book, written before 1875 but not published until 1938, mentioned some of John Wilkes Booth's clandestine activities for the Confederacy and even described him as "a spy, a blockade-runner, a rebel!" It has also been long known that on various occasions during the Civil War Booth had suspicious secret meetings with Confederate secret services operatives in hotels in the North and in Canada, and that Booth emerged from these meetings with sums of money. There is now such a wealth of information confirming Booth's status as an operative for Confederate secret services that we may with complete confidence accept the assertion, made by two respectable scholars in 1998, that "Booth was definitely an agent ... working with confirmed intelligence agents."

Sixth, on his escape route through Maryland and Virginia, John Wilkes Booth traveled along the path of an underground Confederate spy network which was used to secretly transport persons and goods to and from the Confederacy, and as he moved along this route Booth received assistance from members of the clandestine organization operating the network. "If it had not been for key members of the Confederate underground," Edward Steers, Jr., writes, "Booth would never have made his way as far as he did for as long as he did." Previously, it had been thought that Booth's escape route had been randomly chosen, and that the persons who helped Booth along that route were unrelated individuals whose assistance was coincidental.

Everyone agrees that a conspiracy was behind the Lincoln assassination. The question is the scope of the conspiracy. The old view—that the conspiracy consisted (in the words of Edward Steers, Jr.) of only "Booth ... and a gang of semi-intelligent miscreants"—is fading. The trend of thought now is in the direction of the Confederate Grand Conspiracy theory, but nonetheless there is no proof that Jefferson Davis or the Confederate government were involved in the shooting at Ford's Theater; and there are many reasons for believing they were not so involved. However, the man who shot Lincoln was a Confederate spy who only a month previously had masterminded a scheme to abduct Lincoln, a scheme which obviously might lead to death or serious injury for Lincoln if he resisted or tried to escape. At least three of Booth's sidekicks, Lewis Powell, Samuel Mudd, and John Surratt, were engaged in Confederate clandestine operators assisted Booth as he tried to escape.

Furthermore, only two weeks before Lincoln's murder Jefferson Davis had approved a plot to kill Lincoln with a bomb, and the Union did not succeed in putting the operation out of action until April 10, only four days before the assassination in Ford's Theatre; although he was not involved in that particular operation, Booth almost certainly knew of the bomb plan; in what was surely no coincidence, Booth began planning to shoot Lincoln on April 12, the day after a newspaper account revealed the capture of the Confederate agent who was supposed to detonate the bomb at the White House; and Booth's plan, under which, in addition to Lincoln, the vice president and the secretary of state were to be murdered, seems intended to cause the same type of damage and havoc a White House bomb explosion would have caused.

There probably never was a Confederate Grand Conspiracy to murder Lincoln by shooting him at Ford's Theatre. However, until it was quashed four days before Lincoln was shot, there was a Confederate Grand Conspiracy to murder Lincoln with a bomb. Before that, there was a Confederate Grand Conspiracy to forcibly abduct Lincoln and carry him a long distance as a prisoner.

In light of all this, the Simple Conspiracy theory would appear to be on its deathbed, and a modified form of the Confederate Grand Conspiracy theory seems destined to be the new consensus. Old assumptions about the Lincoln assassination are being questioned, and there are new insights into the assassination.

Whatever variant of the Confederate Grand Conspiracy theory becomes the new paradigm, it was still John Wilkes Booth who shot Lincoln. But we must never forget that it was racism, America's greatest and most tragic flaw, that pulled the trigger. In the words of Edward Steers, Jr.:

"The underpinning of the plot to assassinate Lincoln was the institution of slavery. ...

"The underlying motive that caused the Southern leadership and men like John Wilkes Booth to risk all in their effort to 'get' Lincoln was a common belief that slavery was an essential part of the cultural and economic success of the United States. Booth was a White supremacist. Those who joined with him in his plot to remove Lincoln were also White supremacists whose greatest fear was the emancipation of the Black man. Abraham Lincoln was the architect of those emancipation policies.

"... Abraham Lincoln was murdered for trying to extend civil liberties to his fellow citizens."

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RECENT WRITINGS ON THE LINCOLN ASSASSINATION

Works by William Hanchett:

- 1. The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies (1983) This book, only the second book on the assassination ever written by a trained academic historian, examines the various conspiracy theories of the Lincoln assassination. The book's first chapter, "They Hated Lincoln," points out how fiercely Lincoln was hated, both in the North and the South, during the Civil War. Chapter 3 is "The Assassination as a Confederate Grand Conspiracy," and Chapter 4 is "The Assassination as a Simple Conspiracy." This book was the first since 1940 to mention the incident in which Lincoln's aide Charles Forbes granted John Wilkes Booth permission to enter Lincoln's box.
- 2. "Lincoln's Murder: The Simple Conspiracy Theory," 30 *Civil War Times Illustrated* 28 (Nov./Dec. 1991) This article examines the reasons for the long ascendancy of the Simple Conspiracy theory. Setting out newly discovered facts concerning Confederate plans to abduct Lincoln, this article suggests that "the fundamental assumptions of the simple conspiracy [theory]" have now been "discredit[ed] forever." Historical evidence, the author believes, proves that Jefferson Davis would not "have shrunk with horror from assassination, or indeed any lesser crime of violence [against Lincoln]." John Wilkes Booth "demonstrated his devotion to the Confederacy as a smuggler of medicine into the South and as a spy." The author concludes: "The simple conspiracy theory is a superficial explanation of an event whose roots were deep in the Civil War. It ignores or glosses over too much that has been learned about John Wilkes Booth ... and about the spying and covert activities engaged in by both the Union and Confederate governments ... There is much more to the history of the assassination than is encompassed by the simple conspiracy [theory]."
- 3. "The Happiest Day of His Life," 34 *Civil War Times Illustrated* 76 (Dec. 1995) This article reminds us that in early April 1865, "[w]ith the war coming to an end, there must have been thousands of devoted Confederates who recognized that only violent action against Lincoln and other U.S. leaders could save their country, and who therefore believed violent action was justified." The article also points outs that on April 4, 1865, the day after Union troops occupied the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, a Confederate soldier employed at the Torpedo Bureau (one of the Confederate secret services) visited the Union general commanding the occupying

forces there and told him that a few days earlier the Bureau had dispatched a party of men on a special mission which was probably intended to attack Lincoln. It is now known, the article further points out, that such a mission did exist, that Lincoln was to be killed by a bomb blast, that the mission was financed with \$1,500 in gold from Confederate secret services appropriations, that disbursement of the gold was approved by Jefferson Davis and Judah P. Benjamin, and that the mission failed because the explosives expert in charge of the mission was captured a few miles outside Washington, D.C. on April 10.

4. "The Lincoln Assassination Revisited," 7 North and South 33 (Sept. 2000) In light of recent historical research concerning the Lincoln assassination, this article examines old assumptions and modern insights into the assassination. "Victorian gentlemen like Davis and Lincoln were quite capable of attacking each other as a military necessity to save their countries." To those who object to the lack of smoking gun evidence as to Confederate involvement in the plots to kill Lincoln, the article sensibly reminds us: "Since secret government operations do not leave convenient paper trails to smoking guns, the case made by Come Retribution necessarily rests on circumstantial evidence." The article also observes that the Confederate Grand Conspiracy theory is gaining adherents among the general public and among professional historians.

Works by William A. Tidwell:

1. Come Retribution: The Confederate Secret Service and the Assassination of Lincoln (1988) (co-authored with James O. Hall and David Winfred Gaddy) This book gets its title from "Come Retribution," a term the Confederates used for a top secret cipher system they adopted in early 1865. Come Retribution is the single most important Lincoln assassination book of the 20th century. Based on extensive research into primary sources, it was the first book to study the organization, agents, and operations of the Confederate secret services. In the words of one reviewer, the book "came to the conclusion that high-ranking Confederate officials supported John Wilkes Booth in a conspiracy aimed at capturing Lincoln, a conspiracy that evolved into a plan to create chaos by assassinating President Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson, and Secretary of State William H. Seward." Furthermore, in the words of another reviewer, the book concluded that not only did the Confederacy attempt to capture Lincoln, but that "the infrastructure put in place for the capture of the President was subsequently used to aid the escaping assassin." Since the publication of Come Retribution, new research has located additional evidence supporting the book's conclusions, whereas nothing has been found that undermines those conclusions.

- 2. April '65: Confederate Covert Action in the American Civil War (1995) In this book the author provides new, additional evidence in support of the conclusions reached in Come Retribution. The book analyses a skirmish between a detachment of 35 Confederate cavalrymen and a smaller unit of Union cavalry in St. Mary's County, Maryland which occurred on the evening of April 15, 1865, almost exactly 24 hours after John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln. The Confederate detachment served under Confederate Col. John S. Mosby's Virginia cavalry unit, which had close ties with Confederate secret services and participated in clandestine operations. At the time of the skirmish "Booth was making his way through Charles County Maryland ... less than five miles away. If Union cavalry had not accidentally encountered the Confederates, they might well have met Booth and helped him to get to Virginia days before he actually crossed the Potomac."
- 3. "April 15, 1865," 42 *Civil War History* 220 (1996) This article examines the April 15, 1865, skirmish between Confederate and Union cavalry in St. Mary's County, Maryland. The author concludes: "The Confederate cavalry was probably an ad hoc unit established originally to take part in the plan to capture Lincoln, but in altered circumstances the unit may have been trying to help John Wilkes Booth escape when it unexpectedly encountered the Union patrol." The article states that this skirmish "played an important role in the way in which the pursuit unfolded and may help explain some of the actions of Booth and the individuals who assisted him in his escape."
- 4. "Was Booth Part of a Confederate Conspiracy?," in The Day Lincoln Was Shot 63 (Richard Bak ed. 1998) Citing to relevant evidence, this book chapter expounds the thesis that "the Lincoln assassination was not the act of a simple conspiracy; it was the result of a legitimate Confederate clandestine operation that went awry." After John Wilkes Booth and his associates failed, because of a change in Lincoln's plans, to abduct Lincoln on the day they had chosen, Mar. 17, 1865, "the Confederacy adopted a radically different course of action." Around April 1 it sent out an explosives expert who was to kill Lincoln by detonating a mine at the White House but failed in his objective because he was captured by Union soldiers on April 10. It was only after the failure of this mission that Booth decided to shoot Lincoln. Under Booth's plan, Vice President Andrew Johnson, Secretary of State William Seward, and perhaps Secretary of War Edwin Stanton were to be murdered on the same night as Lincoln. Thus, "the actions of Booth clearly were an attempt to approximate the damage that would have been caused by an explosion in the White House." "[C]onventional explanations of the president's murder have been based largely on myth and were influenced by the need to smooth over bitter feelings generated by the Civil War. By blaming the assassination on John Wilkes Booth, acting alone, people on both sides of the conflict could agree that Lincoln's death was

a tragedy for all and get on with the business of restoring the splintered, war-weary country." However, "[o]ver the last decade a large amount of documented evidence has been published that presents a radically different picture of the assassination." "Contrary to popular belief, the Confederates had an active secret service adept at the use of explosives. It's true that there is no list of clandestine agents with John Wilkes Booth's name on it, but there is ample evidence that he acted like one and therefore probably was one. There is a good deal of evidence pointing to a failed plot to kidnap Lincoln. Furthermore, the Confederates had every reason in 1865 to target the Union high command."

5. "The Man Who Shifted the Blame," 40 *Civil War Times Illustrated* 50 (June 2001) This article is about a forgotten Confederate secret services operative, George Nicholas Sanders, who, scholars agree, was almost single-handedly responsible for the early demise of the Confederate Grand Conspiracy theory. At the military trial of Booth's conspirators, Sanders tricked prosecutors intent on proving Confederate involvement in the Lincoln assassination into using witnesses whose testimony incriminating Jefferson Davis and other Confederate leaders was known by Sanders (but not the prosecutors) to be false. When after the trial the testimony was exposed as perjurious, public support for the Confederate Grand Conspiracy theory immediately began to sag, and the Simple Conspiracy theory began its meteoric rise to ascendancy.

Works by Edward Steers, Jr.:

- 1. The Escape and Capture of John Wilkes Booth (1996) Included in this book is a full exposition of the incident in which Charles Forbes permitted John Wilkes Booth to enter Lincoln's box. The book includes a photograph of the headstone erected over Forbes' grave in 1984, as well as a photograph of the May 1, 1865 police disciplinary complaint lodged against bodyguard John F. Parker for "allowing a man to enter the President's private box and shoot the President." From the face of the complaint it appears that Forbes was one of Parker's two accusers.
- 2. "Dr. Mudd and the 'Colored' Witnesses," 46 *Civil War History* 323 (2000) Dr. Samuel A. Mudd, a Maryland physician, was the doctor who famously treated John Wilkes Booth for the broken leg injury Booth suffered while fleeing Ford's Theatre. Mudd was one of eight cohorts of Booth later tried by a military tribunal for involvement in the Lincoln murder, and this article is based on facts revealed in the trial testimony of former slaves of Mudd's. From this testimony it appears that during the Civil War Mudd formed a slave-capturing posse that patrolled looking for runaway slaves, that he was a secret Confederate mail agent, and that he hid Confederate soldiers, as well as weapons and supplies destined for the Confederacy,

on his property. The traditional view of Mudd-that he was simply a kindly country doctor who did not know that the person whose broken leg he set was Booth-is therefore wildly off the mark. Mudd was a secret Confederate agent (who knew Booth).

- 3. "Risking the Wrath of God," 3 *North and South* 59 (Sept. 2000) This article focuses on the failed efforts of clandestine agents working for Confederate secret services to create an outbreak of yellow fever in the North. The article also discusses the manufacture of coal bombs by these agents and their plans to cause these bombs to be smuggled into the furnaces of Northern factories and the boilers of Northern fishing ships.
- 4. <u>Blood on the Moon: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln</u> (2001) One of the best books on the Lincoln murder, this book confirms and expands upon William A. Tidwell's findings as to the involvement of the Confederacy in the murder. It also includes a detailed explanation of the "black flag warfare" by both sides during the Civil War.

Works by Other Authors:

Books

- 1. Betty J. Ownsbey, <u>Alias "Paine:" Louis Thornton Powell, the Mystery Man of the Lincoln Conspiracy</u> (1993) This book provides valuable new information on Lewis Powell, a coconspirator of Booth's who was involved in the abortive plot to abduct Lincoln and who on Booth's orders attempted to murder Lincoln's secretary of state at almost the same time Booth was shooting Lincoln. Powell had served in Confederate Col. John S. Mosby's Virginia cavalry unit, which was involved in covert activities of the Confederate secret services.
- 2. "Right or Wrong, God Judge Me:" The Writings of John Wilkes Booth (John Rhodehamel and Louise Taper eds. 1997) This book reveals that it was in July 1864 that the Confederate secret services recruited Booth to head the operation to abduct Lincoln and that by November 1864 Booth "had given himself over entirely to his grand scheme of saving the Confederacy by capturing Lincoln and carrying him south as a hostage." After agreeing to kidnap Lincoln, Booth went to Montreal, Canada and met with "Confederate spies plotting against the United States. Booth probably received from them both money and intelligence. When he returned to Washington to begin scouting the getaway route through Southern Maryland, he had the names of reliable Confederate sympathizers along the way."

3. Timothy S. Good, <u>We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts</u> (1995) This book is a collection of accounts by theatergoers who were present at Ford's Theatre when Lincoln was assassinated.

Articles

- 1. James O. Hall, "The Dahlgren Papers: A Yankee Plot to Kill President Davis," 22 *Civil War History Illustrated* 30 (Nov. 1983) This is a first rate article on the Dahlgren papers incident. One of the papers found on Dahlgren's corpse was an address he evidently proposed to read to his officers and men in which he exhorted them "to destroy and burn the hateful city, and do not allow rebel leader Davis and his traitorous crew to escape." Another paper was an order stating that "once in the city, it must be burned and Jeff Davis and his Cabinet killed." Another paper contained this sentence: "Jeff Davis and Cabinet must be killed on the spot." The papers were authentic; Union claims that the papers were forgeries are unsupported. On the other hand, in part because the Union army's investigation of the matter was cursory, it has never been determined whether the papers represented directives of the Union government. Photographic copies of the papers are reproduced in the article. The original papers, the article informs us, no longer exist, having almost certainly been destroyed by Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton.
- 2. James E.T. Lange and Katherine DeWitt, "Who Ordered Lincoln's Death?," 1 North and South 16 (June 1998) This summarizes the salutary effects that Come Retribution has had "since it burst onto the Civil War history scene." The article concludes that John Wilkes Booth "seems to have been recruited as an intelligence agent around July of 1864." It examines the abortive efforts of Booth and his coconspirators to capture Lincoln on Mar. 17, 1865. The article suggests that the Confederate government abandoned the abduction plan around the end of that March, at which time it opted for an operation involving "a triple assassination"–killing Lincoln and both his vice president and secretary of state with a bomb explosion at the White House. Almost certainly it was Jefferson Davis and Judah P. Benjamin who "conceived and directed the multiple assassination plot." Booth conceived his plan to shoot Lincoln at Ford's Theatre the day after a local newspaper published an article about the capture in Virginia the day before of Thomas Harney, the explosives expert the Confederacy had sent to set off the explosion. "This is surely no coincidence." The article also points out that there is no record as to where Booth

spent the night before the assassination.

- 3. Adam Mayers, "Spies Across the Border," 40 *Civil War Times Illustrated* 28 (June 2001) This article explores the spy network in Canada established by Confederate secret services.
- 4. Stuart Lutz, "Terror in St. Albans," 40 *Civil War Times Illustrated* 42 (June 2001) This article examines the notorious Oct. 19, 1864 raid on St. Albans, Vermont, when 25 Confederate agents robbed two banks, terrorized local inhabitants, and then fled to Canada.
- 5. Charles S. Clark, "John Frederick Parker," 40 *American History* 16 (Apr. 2005) This article is a biography of the bodyguard whose dereliction of duty made it possible for Booth to murder Lincoln. Although charged with failing to properly protect the president in a complaint dated May 1, 1865, Parker remained on duty at the White House until May 10. On June 2, the complaint and all charges against Parker were dismissed at an administrative hearing, of which no records or accounts exist. Parker remained a police officer until 1868 when in another case he was dismissed for sleeping while on duty. While helpful, the article amounts, in overview, to a failed attempt to whitewash Parker's shocking negligence.