

THE CHARGER



CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

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Join Us For Our Next Meeting

Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2015

Drinks @ 6pm, Dinner @ 6:30

Judson Manor

East 107th St & Chester

Speaker: Dr. Patrick Bray

Reconstruction: Jefferson Davis: A Changing Historical Perspective

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On Trees and Forests: A Review Essay by John C. Fazio, former president of the Cleveland Roundtable

Even the masters go astray occasionally. Edison thought direct current was the wave of the future. Ezra Pound thought Mussolini and Hitler were statesmen instead of the buffoons and bloody tyrants they were. Einstein thought nuclear energy would never be obtainable. So it is, too, sometimes, with historians. Otherwise brilliant and conscientious men and women spend so much time studying trees that they lose sight of the forests.



The issue of John Wilkes Booth's membership in the Confederate Secret Service was raised in the pages of the October, 2015, issue of *The Surratt Courier* as part of Richard Willing's review of Terry Alford's *Fortune's Fool*. The issue is important because Confederate complicity or non-complicity in the assassination hinges on it. Richard tells us that Terry came down on the side of non-complicity and therefore in favor of the simple conspiracy theory. With the greatest respect, my friend Terry is mistaken.

Let us start with the membership issue. Asia, Booth's sister, described him as "a spy, a blockade-runner, a rebel". He told her that he was involved in the "underground" and that the work demanded travel. Would he use the term "underground" to describe his work if he and it were not part of the Secret Service? Clearly, no. That he worked in concert with others and not as a lone wolf is attested to by Asia herself: the unexplained trips, the strange visitors at all hours, the callused hands from nights of rowing, it suddenly all made sense to her. She wrote "He often slept in his clothes on the couch downstairs, having on his long riding boots. Strange men called at late hours, some whose voices I knew, but who would not answer to their names; and others who were perfectly strange to me. They never came farther than the inner sill, and spoke in whispers". (1) Is it reasonable to suppose that these "strange men" were also unattached rogues unknown to Richmond, or is it more reasonable to suppose that they were also Secret Service agents. Clearly, the latter.

Lewis Powell recognized Booth as his superior officer. (2) Would Powell, a former Mosby Ranger and a member of the Secret Service himself (3), who traveled regularly to Baltimore to meet with prominent men who kept him in funds, (4) recognize as his superior officer an actor who was *not* a member of the Secret Service? Clearly, no. And would he recognize Booth as his superior officer without the knowledge and approval of Richmond? Clearly, no.

In the middle of March through early April, 1864, Booth was in New Orleans, where he met and spent a great deal of time with one George Miller (probably an alias), a known Confederate sympathizer who had close ties to prominent men in the Confederate government. The two became so close that they corresponded after Booth left the area. He also met and became "chummy" with a second Confederate sympathizer, Hiram Martin (sounds like another alias), a blockade runner. Miller

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and/or Martin may have been instrumental in bringing Booth into the Secret Service, because by the middle of that April he was already said to have been talking about assassinating Lincoln (5) and because he was, by the end of that summer, in regular contact with Confederate agents and familiar with their cipher system. (5) Further, he followed up his New Orleans experience with a meeting with four Confederate agents on July 26, 1864, at the Parker House in Boston. . It was very soon after this meeting that he began gathering his team. Does all this sound like someone who was not a member of the Secret Service? But there is more.



Booth traveled frequently to Canada in 1864 and hobnobbed with the so-called Canadian Cabinet, i.e. Secret Service agents installed there by the Confederate government after the Wistar and Dahlgren-Kilpatrick raids on Richmond in February and March that year. He was in Montreal in March, in Toronto for 10 or 12 days in April and, most significantly, in Montreal for 10 days in October. (6) Testimony given at the trial of the conspirators placed him in contact, while there, with Canadian Cabinet members Jacob Thompson, Clement C. Clay, James P. Holcombe, Patrick Martin, Dr. Luke Pryor Blackburn and others, especially, and frequently, with George Sanders, the arch-advocate of political assassination as a legitimate tool of national policy. Most importantly, the Canadian Cabinet obviously considered it desirable, if not absolutely necessary, to meet with Booth for 10 days when plans for retribution for Wistar-Dahlgren-Kilpatrick were ripening nicely and had, in fact, in some degree, already been carried out. Booth, obviously, considered it equally desirable, if not absolutely necessary, to accommodate them. Does this sound like a man who was not a member of the Confederate Secret Service? Would the Canadian Cabinet have given Booth the time of day if he were not one of them, much less hosted him for 10 days?

In addition to his trips to Canada, Booth also spent a lot of time in New York meeting with the "New York crowd" and with August Belmont and his Copperhead friends in Belmont's Fifth Avenue Mansion. (7) Would these have bothered with a Washington actor if he did not have strong ties to the Confederate government and its Secret Service? Clearly, no.

Consider, further, that about the time he began to gather his team and put his personal affairs in order (mid to late 1864), he transferred all his assets to his mother and to his older brother, Junius, Jr. This was surely in contemplation of the treason statute of July 17, 1862, which provided for the seizure of the property of anyone who in any way supported the Confederacy. Despite this transfer and despite the fact that by August, 1864, he had no regular income from acting and had lost his investments in oil, he continued to live a life of "riotous dissipation" (per Sam Arnold), to keep his team in funds and even to offer Samuel Chester \$2,000 to \$3,000 (\$28,000 to \$42,000 in 2014 dollars) to join his conspiracy. The evidence is strong that the source of his funds was Richmond. (8) Consider, in this connection, the following: a) Surratt told Dr. Lewis J. A. McMillan, his traveling companion aboard the *Peruvian*, bound for Europe, that he and Booth had spent about \$10,000 on their conspiracy (about \$140,000 in 2014 dollars); b) Booth told Chester he was low on funds and that either he or some other party had to go to Richmond to obtain the means to carry out their designs, a statement that dovetails with Sam Arnold's "Sam" letter, in which he stated that Booth should desist from further activity and "go and see how it will be taken at Richmond"; c) Robert Anson Campbell, the head teller of the Ontario Bank in Montreal, testified that Booth established an account there and that part of the amount deposited came from one "Davis", who operated as a broker and Confederate money handler; d) Arnold told of Booth's necessary trips to New York for more money; e) Atzerodt and Herold were seen flashing rolls of bills in bars and restaurants; f) Arnold and O'Laughlen were said to never lack for funds and to have plenty of money, including gold; g) To enlist Thomas Harbin in his conspiracy, Booth told him that "there is not only glory, but profits in the undertaking (9); h) Booth told his former manager, Matthew Canning, that he was going to "make an immense fortune" on a land deal in Virginia (10); i)

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Atzerodt was reported, by a detective working for Provost Marshal James L. McPhail, to have said that “he with others was engaged in an enterprise that would either make them rich or get them hung on the spot if detected (11); to John Greenawalt, keeper of the Pennsylvania House, he said “I am going away some of these days, but I will return with as much gold as will keep me all my lifetime” (12); j) Herold told friends in Port Tobacco three weeks before the assassination that the next time they heard from him he would be in Spain and have a barrel of money and that he would be rich enough to buy all of Port Tobacco. He told Special Judge Advocate John A. Bingham, his interrogator, that Booth had recruited him to make money. (13); k) Weichmann spoke of an opportunity he had to join an enterprise and make a lot of money—“twenty or thirty thousand dollars, something like that” (14); l) To an old actor friend, John Pope, Booth said “If you fall in with my ideas, we’ll make a fortune” (15); m) To C. D. Hess, an employee of Grover’s Theatre, he said, a few days before the assassination, that he was going f I would do it, I would not want again for as long as I lived; that I would never want for money”. (18) FOLLOW THE MONEY!!! MONEY, MONEY, MONEY!!! Where was all this money coming from? Which is the more reasonable conclusion? That it was coming from Booth, who had no assets left in his name, or from the Confederate government and/or supporters thereof? Clearly the latter. (“Where else?”, asked James O. Hall rhetorically. 19) Would the Confederate government bankroll someone and promise fortunes to him and his team if the someone were not a member of the Secret Service? Clearly, no. The next question is: What was expected of Booth in return for the financing? For doing *what* was the Confederate government going to give Booth and his team all these fortunes?

Think of the matter globally. Could Booth have led a conspiracy against the President, or against “the heads of the government” (20), for some six to nine months, in Washington, a conspiracy that involved at least six co-conspirators, without the knowledge of the Confederate government and its Secret Service? Of course not. As previously seen, he had rubbed elbows with all of them. He was in constant contact with John Surratt, who was in constant contact with Judah Benjamin. Could Secret Service agent Surratt have joined Booth’s conspiracy without the knowledge and approval of Richmond? Of course not. Booth also had established a solid relationship with Thomas Harbin, who wrote, after the war, that he was a Secret Service agent and that he reported directly to Davis. C’mon folks: If Booth’s right hand is Surratt and Surratt is in regular contact with Benjamin, and if Booth has a solid relationship with Harbin and Harbin reports directly to Davis, then how can Benjamin and Davis *NOT* know about Booth and his team and their activities? 21) Further, a cipher square found in Booth’s hotel room after the assassination just happened to be identical to one found in Judah Benjamin’s office after the fall of Richmond. Further, Sam Chester said that it was his impression, based on his conversation with Booth in New York, that Booth’s plans were known to and approved by Confederate leaders. (22) Further, there is the May 10, 1865, letter from a Union agent in Paris, who quotes the Confederate agent “Johnston” as having written that “Booth...will never be taken. He will bullet himself first,” thus evidencing the Confederate underground’s intimate knowledge of Booth. (23) And further, there is the statement of Thomas A. Jones, the self-described head of the Secret Service in Maryland, who wrote, in 1893, that he knew all about Booth’s “kidnapping scheme”. (24) O.K., so the Confederate government unquestionably knew all about Booth. The next question is: Why didn’t they stop him? There are only two possible answers to that question: 1) They knew he planned to kidnap Lincoln and believed that kidnapping would help their cause; or 2) They knew he did not plan to kidnap Lincoln or anyone else, but to murder him and as many other Northern leaders as possible, and believed that such assassinations would help their cause. The first alternative is easily disposed of because, among many other reasons, which space precludes my listing:

- a. Davis later said that only one bona fide kidnapping plan had been brought to him and it wasn’t Booth’s; it was Major General Joseph Walker Taylor’s. Davis rejected the plan, saying “...what value would he be to us as a prisoner?...If he were brought to Richmond, what could I do with him? He would have to be treated like the Magistrate of the North, and we have neither the time nor the provision”.
- b. Secret Service agent Captain Thomas Nelson Conrad wrote, after the war, that “Even had we succeed in capturing Mr. Lincoln or any...members of his cabinet besides, a child could conclude in the light of subsequent events that the move would have accomplished no tangible good to the Confederacy...” If a child could see the folly of it, are we to believe that Davis and Benjamin could not?
- c. What could the Confederate government have done with Lincoln in the face of Northern stonewalling? Pulled out his fingernails?

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- d. From early August, 1864, through March 17, 1865, Booth and his team did almost nothing to advance a kidnapping plan. Arnold complained of “most favorable opportunities” which were missed because Booth showed no interest in them, while he continued “riotous living and dissipation”.
- e. Arnold described the kidnapping plan as something “of such a quixotic nature that there is nothing in it...”
- f. In all the conversations between Canadian Cabinet members, as testified to in the trial of the conspirators, there is one reference to “capturing” and *dozens* to assassination.
- g. In all the letters that came into the possession of the Bureau of Military Justice after the assassination, there is not one reference to kidnapping, capturing or abduction; they all speak only of assassination. One of the letters, signed T.I.O.S., stated “If the four are assassinated our wrongs are avenged...There is one man to every one in the Cabinet...”
- h. The alleged rationale for kidnapping, i.e. the release of Confederate prisoners of war, was completely undercut by the fact that General Grant had, in January, 1865, authorized the resumption of prisoner exchange and had set a goal of 3,000 a week. Arnold brought this to Booth’s attention. Booth ignored him.
- i. On at least three occasions, Booth tried to induce Powell, who did not join Booth and the other co-conspirators until March 15, to murder Lincoln.
- j. In his May 1, 1865, confession, Atzerodt spoke of Booth’s meeting a party in New York who would “get the Prest. certain” and that it was Booth’s purpose to “get him (Lincoln) quick” before the New York crowd did. Does anyone read in these lines an intent to kidnap anyone?
- k. Thomas Maley Harris (a Military Commissioner) and John A. Bingham, who heard all the evidence at the trial and doubtless had access to even more, and Louis Weichmann, all concluded that the “kidnapping plan” never existed. In his closing argument, Bingham mocked it as preposterous.

In addition to the foregoing, there are these considerations:

- l. Powell said to Thomas T. Eckert, Assistant Secretary of War, that government prosecutors did “not have the one-half of them” (i.e. conspirators) and that it was his impression that arrangements had been made with others for the same disposition as he was to make of Seward.
- m. The May 10, 1865, letter from the Union agent in Paris, previously mentioned, in which reference is made to Booth’s bulleting himself in preference to capture, also states that if the “attack” of April 14 had been carried out as previously arranged, some 15 Yankee leaders would be dead.
- n. Dr. Blackburn’s plot to spread pestilence in the North, including sending “infected” shirts to Lincoln as a donation, was positively known to Davis and therefore Benjamin. (25)
- o. Henri Beaumont de Ste. Marie, John Surratt’s boyhood friend and fellow Papal Zouave, stated in an Affidavit prepared in Italy that Surratt admitted to him that he and Booth had killed Lincoln, but refused to say whether or not Davis was involved. To his question “Was Davis involved”, Surratt answered “I am not going to tell you”, which is as good as an affirmative response. (26)

The conclusion is inescapable that Booth was a member of the Confederate Secret Service, that the Confederate leadership knew all about him and his team and what they were up to, and that they did nothing to stop him because they knew that his true purpose was not kidnapping, which would have done them no good at all, but assassination, and more specifically multiple assassinations, which might provide an opening to salvage what appeared by then to be a hopeless cause.

Despite the foregoing, my hat is off to Terry for writing a great book.

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The Union's Jefferson Davis

By Dennis Keating, former president of the Cleveland Roundtable

The Union's Jefferson C. Davis was a general in the Western armies remembered in addition to his name versus the Confederate's President for two notorious incidents. A veteran of the Mexican War, he was a member of the garrison of Ft. Sumter when it was bombarded in April, 1861 to begin the Civil War. He would fight at Pea Ridge as a division commander, then at Shiloh and the siege of Corinth.

After that, he was granted a leave of absence. Returning to duty, he was ordered to report to General William "Bull" Nelson at Louisville. On September 22, 1862 at Nelson's hotel HQ, they had a confrontation resulting in Nelson's relieving Davis of duty. After reporting to Horatio Wright in Cincinnati, Davis was sent back to Louisville after Don Carlos Buell took charge.

On September 29, he confronted Nelson and demanded an apology. After being slapped by an enraged Nelson, Davis pursued Nelson and shot and killed him. Instead of being tried for murder, Wright intervened to protect Davis.

Davis served under William Tecumseh Sherman, becoming commander of the XIV Corps, serving in the Atlanta campaign, the March to Sea, and the Carolinas campaign. It was during the March to the Sea that Davis once again attracted notoriety. On September 9, 1864, Davis' command was the rearguard with escaping slaves following Sherman's army as it crossed Georgia heading for Savannah. Before the slaves could cross Ebenezer Creek, the army's pontoons were removed. With Joseph Wheeler's Confederate cavalry approaching, panicked blacks tried to swim across the creek, Many drowned in the attempt and those who remained on the western bank were captured and re-enslaved. Despite criticism, Davis defended his action and was supported by Sherman, including when they were questioned by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton about the incident. At Bentonville, his corps was the target of Joseph Johnson's assault on the first day of the battle, which was finally repulsed.

So, Davis emerged unscathed without punishment from these two controversial incidents. After the war, he became the commander of the Department of Alaska (1868-1870) and following the assassination of General Edward Canby, he assumed command and ended the Modoc War in Oregon (1872-1873).

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