

# IN CAMP ALONG THE MONOCACY



From Blue And Gray Education Society Field Headquarters in Frederick Maryland

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## ***Abraham Lincoln: Projects, Presidential Access and Protection, Conspiracy and Assassination***

When one thinks of Abraham Lincoln, one thinks of a country lawyer, a US Representative from the state of Illinois, and as our 16<sup>th</sup> President during one of the most tumultuous times in our history – the Civil War. One also thinks of Lincoln's assassination at Ford's Theatre, the manhunt for John Wilkes Booth and his subsequent death rather than surrender, and the capture and trial of his conspirators in crime.

**Gloria Swift with assistant Fred** BGES has always had an involvement with Lincoln. In addition to offering tours and symposiums regarding Lincoln, BGES has become directly involved with at least two Lincoln projects of which I have been proud to play a part, but in different capacities.

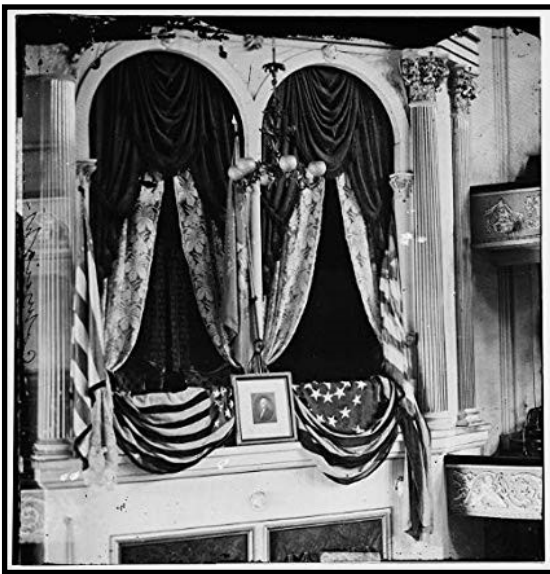
In 2008 Ford's Theatre National Historic Site was undergoing a major repair and renovation project as well as designing new museum exhibits. I was still working for the National Park Service in 2008 and was, in fact, the museum curator of the site. The goal for completion of the project was to have the theatre and new museum area open in time for Lincoln's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday on February 12, 2009.

Sometime in 2008 (I'm sorry to say I don't exactly remember when) Executive Director Len Riedel and a BGES group came to Ford's. While they could not access the interior of the theatre, they were able to see the Petersen House across the street; the house where Lincoln died. While they were visiting, I took the opportunity to go down from my office to say hello as Len and I were old friends. During the course of our conversation, Len asked if there was anything that BGES could do for Ford's Theatre to help with the period interpretation. As it turned out, there was one important, yet unfunded project that was needed: new reproduction period flags for the presidential theatre box. The reproduction flags that were in use on the box had been there since the 1960's, the first renovation period of the theatre. For the next forty years, through all the theatre performances and periods of heavy visitation, the flags had hung on the box and eventually became heavily soiled

and extremely yellowed with the passage of time. New ones were needed!

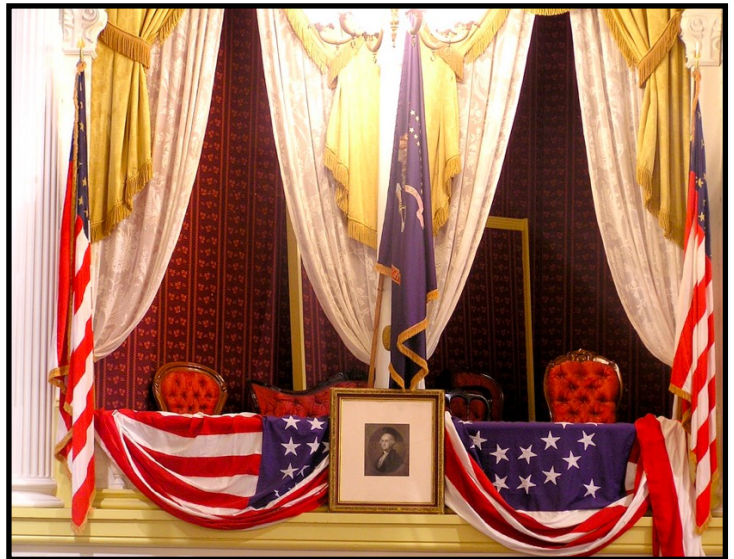
Len asked me to find out the cost of new reproduction period flags, which I did. While the flags on either side of the box and over the bannisters were not a problem to find and price out, the blue silk flag in the middle, the Treasury Guard flag, was going to be a bit more difficult. The original Treasury Guard flag was made of silk, and the eagle, stars and lettering were all hand painted. Where was I going to find someone who could do this type of work?

In the course of my work at Ford's Theatre, I had developed a working relationship with the Army Medical Museum in Washington DC (now at Bethesda, MD). As I was speaking to the staff there about the flag project, it turned out that one of the curators at the Medical Museum was an artist and made reproduction period flags out of his home for reenactors and other places in need of them. Wow! How could I get so lucky?! After reviewing pieces of his previous work, he was contracted to reproduce the Treasury Guards flag for Ford's Theatre. It came out beautifully and it was exact!



Above, an 1865 photo of the Presidential box at Ford's Theatre and to the right, the box today with the flags donated by BGES.

All in all, the flag project at Ford's Theatre cost roughly \$6000.00 – BGES members in their generosity raised the amount to cover that cost in very little time. For the acceptance and completion of this project I am ever grateful to the members of BGES. It is thanks to them that new flags were put up on the presidential box in time for the theatre reopening in February 2009!



At left, an image of the original Treasury Guard flag that was reproduced exactly for use on the Presidential box today at Ford's Theatre. The new flag can be seen in the center of the photo above



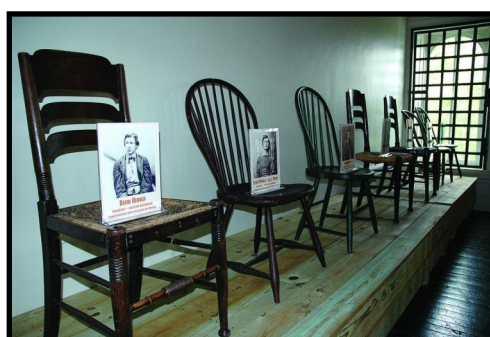
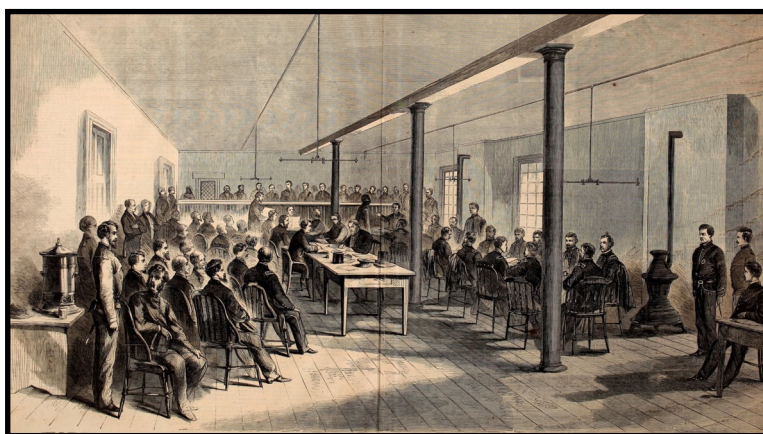


A second Lincoln project came in to focus for BGES in August 2015. During a Lincoln symposium that I had organized for BGES in Washington DC, the group had the opportunity to visit Fort McNair and see the site of the trial of the Lincoln conspirators. Located in what is today called “Grant Hall”, the building had been part of the original penitentiary where the conspirators had



Grant Hall, above. Leslie’s Illustrated drawing of the trial, 1865, to the right. Below, the recreated courtroom today.

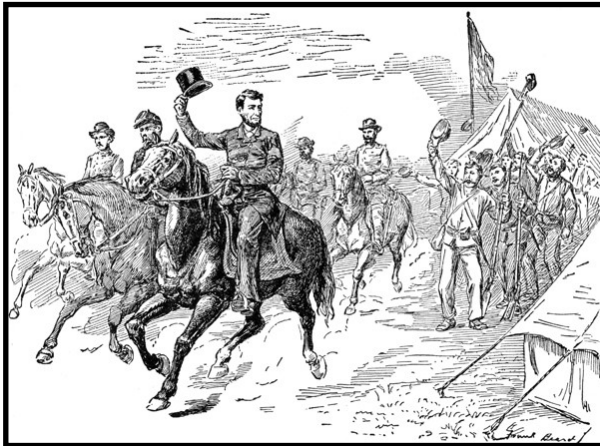
been held on the grounds of the Washington Arsenal. A hastily cobbled together makeshift courtroom on the top floor of the building is where the trial began in May 1865 and lasted for seven weeks. Booth’s coconspirators, George Atzerodt, Lewis Powell, David Herold, Mary Surratt, Samuel Arnold, Michael O’Laughlin, Edmund Spangler, and Samuel Mudd sat in this room together as the military court decided their fate. All were found guilty, but only four were sentenced to hang – Atzerodt, Powell, Herold and Surratt. The other four were imprisoned, but later pardoned by President Andrew Johnson.



Left, another view of the courtroom today from the Juror’s table. The witness box is seen in the center of the room. In the above photo the chairs marking the place of the conspirators sit as silent witnesses.

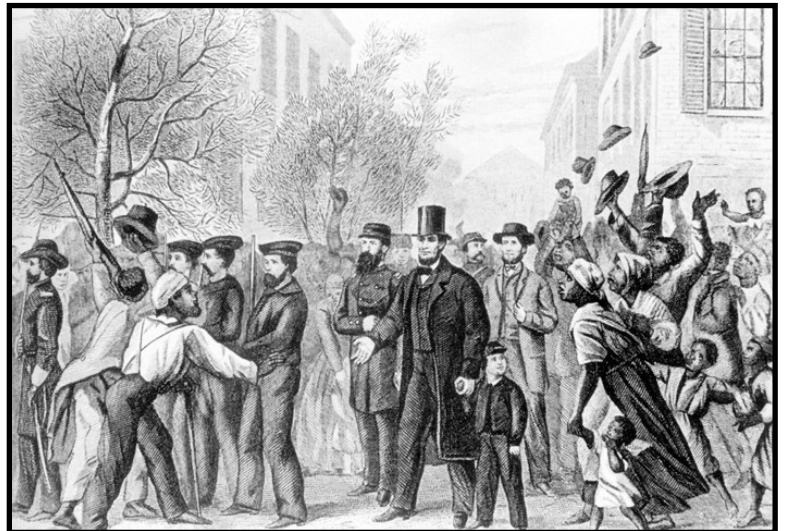
The scene of the trial has been reproduced in the original room – reproduction furniture and other items give you the sense of the events that took place. Additional items are needed and BGES has stepped in to offer to help. In addition, several wayside exhibit panels are planned for the exterior in order to tell the story. It is a fairly large project and BGES membership will be called upon to support it, but it is currently working its way through the approval process with the Army so stay tuned.

In thinking of Lincoln and the assassination, one has to wonder how the idea of assassinating the President came about. Unfortunately, Europe had a long history of dethroning royals in whatever capacity was convenient – including assassination! But no one ever thought that such a deed would happen here. However, In writing about the President and his safety, Lincoln’s secretary, John Nicolay would say: “From the very beginning of his presidency, Mr. Lincoln had been constantly subject to the threats of his enemies....His mail was infested with brutal and vulgar menace and warning of all sorts came to him from zealous or nervous friends....The President was too intelligent not to know that he was in some danger. Madmen frequently made their way to the very door of the executive office, and sometimes into Mr. Lincoln’s presence. But he had himself so sane a mind, and a heart so kindly, even to his enemies, that it was hard to him to believe in political hatred so deadly as to lead to murder.”



Lincoln was finally to give in to those most concerned for his safety – his wife Mary, who, as Lincoln said, “had got it into her head that I shall be assassinated” and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who since 1862 had begun to “up” the security around the Presi-

dent. Wherever Lincoln went he had an escort of cavalry, or if walking the streets of Washington was always accompanied by plain clothes police walking next to him and not behind him. During these walks, accessibility of the public to the President was never deterred.



Drawing above, Lincoln with his cavalry detail. Drawing to the right—Lincoln walking the streets of Richmond. Could the man behind Lincoln dressed in plain clothes be a policeman Stanton appointed?

So, was the Lincoln assassination the act of a single mad man acting alone with the support of a few conspirators, or was the plot part of a larger Confederate conspiracy? Who was working with whom? The assassination of Lincoln has been studied to infinity with no firm conclusions. However, there are also many “branches” of the story, if you will, that can lead to interesting theories and can supply different viewpoint. With that in mind, read next about one of those branches written by BGES member Paul Severance, “*The Peril of Unintended Consequences: Did Lincoln’s Humane Interest in Freeing Union Prisoners-of-War Lead to his Assassination?*”

Enjoy!

*Gloria*

## ***The Peril of Unintended Consequences: Did Lincoln's Humane Interest in Freeing Union Prisoners-of-War Lead to his Assassination?***

Hello, venerated Civil War Aficionados. This is my first article in this publication, so I'm looking for "friendly faces." By way of background, I am the Historian and Chief Docent of the Lincoln Assassination Conspirators Courtroom at Fort McNair in Washington, DC. Since immersing myself into this particular role in February 2013, I have been continually intrigued by the literally hundreds of "branches and sequels" that seem to attend the Lincoln Assassination and the subsequent man-hunt, arrest and incarcerations, trial, sentences, executions, and interments. As just one "narrowly" focused branch, consider the intriguing array of events associated with eleventh hour attempts to save Mary Surratt from her fearsome rendezvous with the hangman's coarse noose on the Washington Penitentiary gallows, to include the plea of leniency for Mary signed by five members of the military commission (after they had formally sentenced her to death), the early morning appeal for a writ of *habeas corpus* by Mary's devoted lawyers, and Anna Surratt's heart-rendering attempt to appeal to President Johnson at the White House on the morning of her mother's scheduled execution, only to be physically thwarted by Preston King and James Lane, both of whom soon committed suicide. Hmmmm. Another branch worthy of plumbing.

For me, however, as a military strategist, and an educator charged with facilitating the strategic intellectual development of senior U.S. military officers and civilian executives at National Defense University, one of the more rewarding dimensions of senior professional military education (PME) is probing the direct, long-term, and second and third order effects of strategic political and military decisions. Similarly, the study of "unintended consequences" of decisions of an action taken based on decisions made holds a particular allure.

With respect to the Lincoln assassination and its aftermath, one such cause and effect phenomenon ("branch") with multiple sequels is the enduring murky question of the degree to which the Union cavalry raids into the environs of Richmond conducted by Generals Isaac Wister and H. Judson Kilpatrick in 1864 influenced an alleged strategic Confederate decision to pursue "Black Flag Warfare" as a response, or perhaps "retaliation," especially as it might have directly engendered the vicious attacks on Lincoln and Seward and (though not immediately evident in mid-April 1865), the planned assassinations of President Andrew Johnson and General of the Armies, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant. By way of context, Black Flag Warfare means that no quarter will be given (and no quarter is expected) in combat. More important for our purposes, as generally understood in the American Civil War, Black Flag Warfare refers to the conduct of military operations generally considered outside the traditional boundaries of conventional warfare and includes such forms of warfare as *irregular*, *guerilla*, and/or *partisan warfare*. Indeed, the Black Flag was flown by a number of irregular Confederate units during the Civil War to announce that they would neither give nor accept quarter (reflecting the opposite of the white flag of surrender).



In the hope of generating wholesome "intellectual popcorn" and informed discussion amongst the members of our esteemed Society, let me provide some basic context for the question at hand. As one might expect, there are many facets to this particular (and very narrowly defined) "branch and sequel." To "walk the dog back," so to speak, one might first return to Union General George Stoneman's cavalry raid against Richmond in May 1863, in advance of the Pennsylvania Campaign





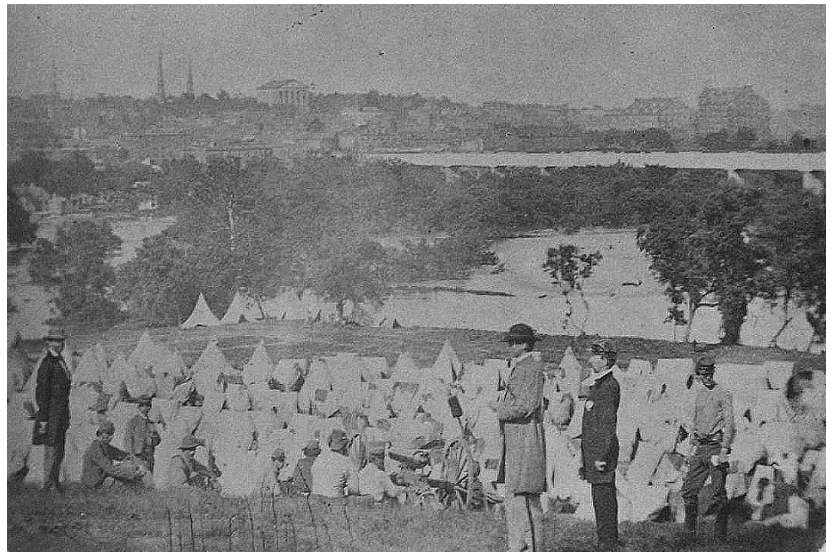
**Judson Kilpatrick**

and culminating Battle of Gettysburg. In this operation, Stoneman and his troops approached to within two miles of Richmond. Of tantalizing interest for subsequent historical analysis, one of the subordinate commanders on this raid was no other than H. Judson Kilpatrick. More on this later.

In the wake of the raid, based on reports of exchanged prisoners possessing “street cred” by virtue of having been there, Richmond was described as being lightly defended and could have been easily captured by Stoneman and his troopers. Of course, the question of how long Stoneman could have held the city was apparently not intensively addressed. Suffice to say, the “On to Richmond” mentality was still apparently alive and well in the spring of 1863. More to the point, however, in terms of “effects” analyses, based on extant sources, the raid had a major psychological impact

and caused great consternation in Richmond, extending to the highest levels of the Confederate States government.

If one were to attempt to “connect the dots,” so the speak, concerning this area of inquiry, the next major “dot” in this “branch” would likely be the reported horror of Union prisoners-of-war (POWs) incarcerated in Confederate “prisons,” such as they were. Students of the Civil War will recall that the long-standing prisoner exchange cartel between the Union and the Confederacy was unilaterally terminated the day after Gettysburg, leading to the gestation of the horrific prison camps (Elmira,



**Belle Isle prison in the James River, Richmond Virginia. Note state capital in the background**



**A RICHMOND PRISONER.**

*Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1864, by E. Wallace, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.*

Belle Isle, Camp Douglas, Rock Island, Andersonville, Point Lookout, Libby Prison, Fort Warren, et al.) on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. Contemporary sources clearly establish that the plight of Union POWs and associated “horror” stories emanating from the South regarding the incarceration, treatment, and (lack of) care of Union POWs became a major emotional issue - - arguably well -stoked by an indignant (and powerful) press - - in the North, extending all the way to the White House and generating a growing call for action to release Union prisoners from Confederate “Hell-Camps.” By November 1863, almost 13,000 Union officers and enlisted men were held captive in Richmond’s prisons.

In November 1863, Union POW’s in Richmond planned an “uprising” to escape from Confederate POW camps in Richmond and make an escape to Union lines. This endeavor was to be directly aided by Union operations launched from the Peninsula. Not surprisingly, the attempt failed miserably, no doubt hastening the Confederate Government’s decision to relocate Union POWs deeper into the heartland of the Confederacy.

**At left, Belle Isle prisoner Jackson Broshears of the 65th Indiana**

Meanwhile, the irrepressible Major General Ben “Spoons” Butler, having replaced Foster in command at Fort Monroe, initiated planning for a new raid into Richmond to prevent the reported relocation of Union POWs at Belle Isle to Camp Sumter in Andersonville, GA. This objective was the genesis of another cavalry raid into Richmond by Brigadier General Isaac J. Wister. Indeed, Wister developed the specifics of the plan. The objectives of Wister’s raid were to cross the Chickahominy River and destroy selected military objectives. This raid was to be supported by a convincing offensive demonstration conducted by the Army of the Potomac. However, the interim commander of the Army of the Potomac at this specific time, Major General John Sedgwick, opposed the raid. On the other hand, the raid was approved by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton (and General of the Army Henry Halleck). Curiously, the raid included the addition of Colonel Lafayette Baker’s para-military force of “Rangers” to the raiding force. The addition of Baker’s force is of some interest since Baker was the chief of Stanton’s National Detective Police within the War Department and clearly suggests that Stanton had a direct role in the decision to launch a rescue attempt of Union prisoners-of-war. Perhaps of greater import, the historical record also implies that President Lincoln was also aware of the operation and no doubt supported the attempt given the emotionally charged issue of Federal POW’s in Richmond’s prison camps.

The raid had three major military objectives: 1) Repatriate the Union POWs in Richmond; 2) Destroy public property of military import - - including Tredegar Ironworks - - and other facilities supporting the Confederacy’s war-making effort; and 3) **Capture** (emphasis added) Confederate leaders and detain them to counter Confederate threats of retaliation against Union soldiers, especially Black Union soldiers.

The ambitious and arguably risky raid kicked-off on February 6, 1864. Unfortunately, reflecting the prescriptive admonitions of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussian military strategist Karl von Clausewitz concerning the capricious and largely uncontrollable impacts of fog, friction, and chance” (i.e., probabilities) in the conduct of warfare, the Confederates had gotten wind of the raid, were well-prepared to receive it, and repulsed Wistar’s force well outside Richmond’s defenses. As the story goes, the planned “raid” was common knowledge around Fort Monroe, and an escaped Confederate POW spilled the beans to Confederate officials about the impending raid. Additionally, in the finger-pointing that attended the aftermath, Union leaders also blamed a lack of sufficient forces and a failure of the Army of the Potomac to support the mission with a vigorous demonstration as major factors in the failure of the raid.

Not surprisingly, soon after the failed raid, Confederate President Jefferson Davis directly acknowledged the threat posed by Union raids against the Confederate capitol in a message to the Confederate Congress. Some students of Civil War “Black Flag Warfare” maintain that this message by Davis to Congress was the opening gambit in the Confederate government’s intent to adopt a more expansive and aggressive strategy of Black Flag Warfare. It should come as no surprise, then, that February 1864 also witnessed the formal dispatch of the first Confederate “Commissioners to Canada - - led by Jacob Thompson, Clement Clay, John Cleary, and George Harper - - who were charged with the planning and conduct of irregular warfare and what would today be considered terrorist activities in the “Old Northwest” states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois and the northern tier of Union states adjacent to the Canadian border. More directly related to the Lincoln Assassination, twenty-two-year old John Harrison Surratt, Jr., who was the head of the Confederate Secret Service in Maryland and who joined John Wilkes Booth’s kidnapping conspiracy in December 1864, served as a courier of messages between Richmond and these same “Commissioners.” Moreover, most serious students of the Lincoln assassination will recall that Surratt’s mother was put on trial and hanged in 1865 for her presumed part in the Lincoln assassination. But, wait for it . . . the many nefarious activities and operations of the Confederate Cabinet in Canada will be addressed in a subsequent article.



Ulric Dahlgren

Despite the abysmal failure of the Wistar raid, Lincoln, Stanton, and Halleck were not to be denied. Ergo, the very quick impetus for the Dahlgren-Kilpatrick raid later in February. Viewed broadly, this raid had the same over-arching military objectives of freeing Union POWs and destroying Confederate war-making property and resources and was launched in the last week of February and extended into the first week of March 1864 (see accompanying map). As most students of the Civil War in the Eastern Theater know, this two-pronged assault into Richmond also floundered on the shoals of disaster. However - - and most importantly - - what significantly changed the "calculus" for potential for future Black Flag Warfare by

the Confederacy was the fact that Colonel Ulric Dahlgren - - leading a force of 500 men attacking from the south - - was killed in the operation and documents were found on his body that clearly indicated that an additional principal objective of the raid was **to assassinate Jefferson Davis** (emphasis added) and other key members of the Confederate States government!



Death of Colonel Ulric Dahlgren



Map of the February/March  
Kirkpatrick and Dahlgren  
raid on Richmond.

1864



Several thoughtful students of this phase of the war have suggested that this raid and its underlying objectives were instrumental in 1) convincing the Confederate government to resort to "Black Flag Warfare" and 2) retaliate in-kind against the Union military and political hierarchy, to include the assassination of Lincoln, Seward, Johnson, and Grant. Additionally, one may reasonably conclude that a "No-Quarter" stratagem adopted by the Confederacy's leadership may have later been the motive force behind Army Judge Advocate Joseph Holt, in his capacity as Chief Prosecutor of the Lincoln assassination conspirators and his prosecution team's decision to go to such great lengths at the beginning of the Lincoln assassination conspirators trial to implicate Jeff Davis, the Confederate government in Richmond (including Secretary of State Judah Benjamin and Secretary of War James Seddon) , and the so-called Confederate Cabinet in Canada. Interestingly, this "branch" then evolves into one of the major, juicy conspiracy theories that attend the Lincoln Assassination to this day, the so-called "Grand Conspiracy."

So, in closing, let me offer a few small "sequels" or potential "lines of inquiry" to close out this discourse. What was the eventual impact of the infamous "Sam" letter found in John Wilkes Booth's possessions in the National Hotel after the assassination, wherein the writer (generally considered to be Samuel Arnold) implores Booth to vet his plan with "R- - - - d." What was the extent of Booth's relationship with John Surratt, the courier for the Confederate government between Richmond and Canada? More significantly, what was the full extent of Lincoln's planning for both the Wistar and Dahlgren-Kilpatrick raids? In parallel, what role did the press - - both North and South - - play in inciting popular passions and possibly influencing strategic decisions and subsequent actions with respect and response to the perceived intent and objectives of Union cavalry raids into and around the Confederate Capital? Today, we call this phenomenon "optics!"

Finally, let me gratefully acknowledge the very fine article written by Joseph George, Jr., entitled *Black Flag Warfare: Lincoln and the Raids Against Richmond and Jefferson Davis*, published in the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, Vol CXV, no. 3, July 1991, from which the corpus of this article was drawn. George makes a compelling case for the decision of the Confederacy to undertake Black Flag Warfare in 1864 in response to the Wistar and Dahlgren-Kilpatrick raids and lays a very solid firmament for the possible relationship between John Wilkes Booth and the Confederate government with respect to the planning and execution of the Lincoln assassination.

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