

**A PERILOUS ROAD**

**THE FLIGHT OF JOHN WILKES BOOTH**

**January 7, 2015 meeting of the Athenaeum Society**

**Presented by Duncan Cavanah**

The first jolting explosion ripped through the Boston afternoon at 2:49 PM. The second just 13 seconds later. The explosions had the instantaneous effect of transforming a joyous and celebratory afternoon into a scene of immediate terror. Soon, the city would be a wash of blood, sirens and panic. The date was April 15, 2013, and terrorists had just struck an American institution, the Boston Marathon.

An outraged nation clamored for the capture of the individuals responsible for the senseless death of three innocent people and the injury of nearly three-hundred more. As the hours stretched into days, however, questions began to arise as to whether the individuals responsible would be apprehended and brought to justice. Could these brazen attackers actually evade punishment for these horrendous acts? Millions of Americans diligently followed the news to track the progress of the investigation as a vast police force pursued the culprits. Finally, after a suspenseful four day pursuit, bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev was killed in a shootout with police in Watertown, Massachusetts. Later that evening, fellow bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev arrested. Following a massive four-day manhunt, the perpetrators of this terrible crime were subdued.

With the exception of the few lines just devoted to it, I do not intend to speak to you tonight about the Boston Marathon bombing. Instead, I use it only as a segue to another notorious crime and resulting manhunt that occurred approximately one-hundred and fifty years prior to the Boston bombing. Like the marathon bombing, this act involved a very public spectacle of violence. Just as many seated in this room anxiously watched and listened to the pursuit of the terrorists in Boston, a much younger nation was transfixed with the chase of another assailant. The same

excitement and anxiety that swept the nation during the pursuit of the terrorists in 2013 impacted the American people one-hundred and fifty years earlier. But unlike its modern parallel, this earlier chase would not reach its dramatic conclusion in a relatively brief four days, but rather would linger on for nearly two weeks. The year was 1865, the perpetrator was John Wilkes Booth, and the victim was Abraham Lincoln. Tonight's paper will tell the story of the manhunt for Lincoln's killer.

In the Spring of 1865, the great national tragedy that was the American Civil War was coming to a close. Abraham Lincoln had been reelected and conducted his second inauguration on March 4, 1865. A young southern actor named John Wilkes Booth sat within a stone's throw of Lincoln as he addressed a recovering nation.

John Wilkes Booth was only 26 years old in 1865. He was a product of the most prominent American acting family in the country. His father, Junius Brutus Booth, emigrated from England to the United States in the early nineteenth century and was regarded as the greatest Shakespearean actor of the age. John's older brother, Edwin Booth, is considered by some to be the greatest American actor of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. John Wilkes Booth was well regarded for his acting ability as well, but was more known for his striking good looks and affinity towards women. In an era before television and movies, John Wilkes Booth was a famous playboy.

Despite Booth's seemingly carefree lifestyle, he carried a much darker side. Booth grew up in Maryland and Virginia, and considered himself a true son of the South and a defender of the Confederacy. Though he never took arms for the Confederacy, he spoke out against what he believed was northern tyranny and oppression of his people.

(Of course, Booth had no qualms about oppression of people he considered less than himself.) Booth's anti-Union words evolved into desperate action as it became apparent that the Confederacy would fall at the hands of the Union as the Civil War reached its conclusion.

In the early months of 1865, Booth began to establish contacts with secret service agents of the Confederacy. During these clandestine meetings, a harebrained scheme for kidnapping the President of the United States was hatched. The idea was for the President to be taken by force and carried to Richmond, at which time he would be ransomed in exchange for release of Confederate prisoners of war and other considerations. It was during the staging of this event that Booth helped piece together a team of conspirators, many of whom would be involved in his later amended plot and subsequent flight from the authorities. The kidnapping plot was scheduled to occur on March 20, 1865 as Abraham Lincoln and his wife Mary traveled to Campbell Hospital to attend a play performed for injured Union troops. Booth and his team of co-conspirators laid in wait on the roadside at the appointed time ready to put their seemingly absurd plan into action. However, Lincoln's plans changed at the last minute, and he did not attend the play, leaving Booth and his co-conspirators frustrated. With the failure of the kidnapping plan, the team of conspirators split up, leaving Booth alone in Washington with his rage at the President and the Union ever increasing.

On April 3, 1865, only one month from the date of Booth's failed kidnapping plot, the city of Richmond fell. Less than one week later, on April 9, Robert E. Lee surrendered his forces at Appomattox Courthouse. In the days that followed, the city of Washington, which had been a scene of death and depression for four years, erupted

into life. Spontaneous parades and fireworks filled the city. The celebration of the destruction of what Booth considered to be his country pushed Booth further toward violent action. On the evening of April 11, Lincoln gave an impromptu speech to a group of gatherers at the White House celebrating Lee's surrender. During the speech, Lincoln mentioned his wish for at least limited black suffrage. The racist Booth, who had followed the crowd to the executive mansion bristled at this idea. "Now, by God, I'll put him through."

On the morning of April 14, 1865, by a stroke of luck, Booth saw a chance to put his murderous thoughts into action. Booth frequently received mail at one of the local theaters in which he routinely performed. On that morning, Booth strolled into Ford's Theater to get his mail when he learned from the proprietor that the President and First Lady were to attend that evening's performance of *Our American Cousin*. Booth took this as a sign of Providence. The architect of the destruction of Booth's world, for whom Booth harbored murderous intent, was traveling that evening to Booth's own home turf. Booth knew Ford's Theater as he knew his own body. Every attendant, every passageway and every step was known to Booth, and his celebrity provided him unquestioned access to all of it. What he did not have was time. Booth wanted to overthrow one of the most powerful governments in the world, and he had approximately 8 hours to put his plan in action.

Booth's first step would be to assemble as many of his co-conspirators from his previous attempt at the President to aid him in this last desperate effort. Though there were about ten individuals involved in the kidnapping plot, only four were readily available to Booth on 14<sup>th</sup> of April. Booth called an emergency meeting at the

company's customary rendezvous point, the home of Washington widow Mary Surratt. There, he met with the three men who would help him strike a deadly blow to the Union. These men were David Herold, Lewis Powell and John Atzerodt. Booth had already seduced the three men into his service by means of his legendary charm as well as the lure of money and power he presented to these otherwise nondescript individuals. Booth informed them that he would kill the President, and if possible, Ulysses S Grant, who was scheduled to attend the play with the Lincolns. But this singular blow would not be sufficient to truly cripple the nation. Instead, Prussian immigrant John Atzerodt would be assigned to kill Vice President Andrew Johnson while Lewis Powell, the 21-year-old son of a Baptist minister, would kill Secretary of State William Seward. Herold, a 22-year-old pharmacist's assistant, would act as a guide to lead the company from their destruction in Washington through the Maryland wilderness and into the waiting arms of the deep South, where they would seek their salvation. Despite some serious hesitation from Atzerodt, who did not object to kidnapping, but wanted no part of killing, the conspirators ultimately trusted in their leader and immediately set the plan into action.

The President and First Lady arrived late at the theater that evening. This occurred in part due to a sudden change in plans when Ulysses S. Grant had to decline the President's invitation to join the first family at the theater that evening. Some suggest this was as a result of Grant's wife bearing the brunt of Mary Lincoln's famous temper at a previous social gathering, though the actual reason remains lost to history. As a replacement, the Lincolns invited the young Major Henry Rathbone and his fiancée, Clara Harris, the daughter of the New York senator. Booth was disappointed to learn that Grant, another welcome target, would not be within the range of his pistol that

evening. The Lincolns arrived at the theater as the play was in progress. As they stepped into their box, as a testament to Lincoln's only recently-won popularity, the play halted mid-scene, and the audience and cast gave the President a long ovation before resuming the play. As this touching scene unfolded, John Wilkes Booth was lurking.

Booth ducked in to the Star Saloon, immediately next door to the theater, for a last drink, perhaps to steady his hand, at 10:00 PM. He had previously rented a horse which he had stashed in an area behind the theater known as Baptist Alley, saddled and ready for a quick departure. Rather than stable horse or tie it, which might have slowed his escape, Booth asked a young man named John Burroughs, frequently called John Peanut due to the concessions he sold outside the theater, to hold his horse for him in the alley until he returned. After his drink at the Star Saloon, Booth returned to the theater and briefly listened to the play. Booth knew the play line for line, and had planned for the exact moment of his strike against the President. Specifically, Booth knew the exact moment in which the lead actor would deliver a line which would result in great uproarious laughter from the audience. He would strike at that moment in hopes of the crowd muffling the report from the pistol. Booth made his way to the door leading to the box, and found it unguarded other than the President's valet. Booth used his fame and charm to talk his way into the box. Once he stealthily entered, Booth retrieved a music stand he had hidden in the box earlier in the day and barred further entry into the door. He then turned his attention to the President. At 10:15 PM, Booth slipped unnoticed behind the President, pulled out his single shot .44 caliber derringer, and shot the President just below the left ear. Lincoln immediately slumped lifeless in his chair. Lincoln's guest, Major Rathbone, a battle-hardened veteran, leapt into action when he

realized what was taking place, and attempted to attack the President's assailant. However, Booth was armed with a large knife as well, and violently slashed Rathbone in the shoulder. Booth then leapt from the Presidential box to the stage below. During the leap, the typically agile Booth caught himself in some of the bunting around the Presidential box and landed awkwardly, injuring his ankle. Ignoring the result of this awkward fall, Booth stepped boldly to the front of the stage and delivered what he considered to be his proudest line as a thespian. "Sic semper tyrannis!" Thus, ever to tyrants.

With his daring role in the assassination now complete, Booth faced the daunting task of escaping the nation's capital with his life. The great manhunt was nearly over before it began. In the commotion of the shot and Booth's shocking leap to the stage, much of the audience was completely baffled as to what was taking place. Was this part of the show? What happened in the Presidential box? Why is John Wilkes Booth on the stage? In all of the confusion, aside from Major Rathbone, who now lay seriously wounded in the Presidential box, the only individual in the theater who realized the desperate nature of the hour and rose to the defense of his country and his President was Army Major Joseph Stewart, who happened to be in the Ford's Theater audience that evening. Major Stuart, a giant for the time at 6'5", rose from his seat, ran across the chair backs of the orchestra pit, and leapt to the stage in pursuit of Booth. Stuart chased Booth out of the theater's back hallway and into Baptist Alley, and reached the killer just as Booth mounted his horse. Stuart came tantalizingly close. He was able to get his hands on Booth, and very nearly pulled him off his horse, which would have put a quick



end to any attempted flight. However, Booth escaped Stewart's grip and spurred his horse, which sped Booth off into the dark Washington night.

As Booth was successfully completing his act of terror at Ford's Theater, the rest of the hurriedly thrown together plot was predictably devolving into a debacle. George Atzerodt, who begrudgingly accepted the task to kill Vice President Andrew Johnson, completely lost his nerve. Atzerodt was staying in the same hotel as the Vice President, and was, in fact, just one floor above Johnson's unguarded room. With no security, and likely no witnesses, Atzerodt's deed should have been the easiest of all the dark company, but Atzerodt's heart was not in it. Instead, Atzerodt never made contact with his intended target that night. He simply abandoned the scene and disappeared.

Lewis Powell's target, Secretary of State William Seward, would not be as lucky as the Vice President. Powell, a burly and powerful Confederate veteran, talked his way into Seward's home by saying that he carried medicine to deliver to Seward, who was recuperating in bed after a near fatal carriage accident. After Powell gained entrance into the home, Seward's family began to have doubts as to the legitimacy of this late-night visitor, and ultimately asked him to leave the home. In response, Powell tore into a violent rampage. First, Powell savagely beat Seward's adult son Frederick in the head with the butt of his pistol. Once Frederick Seward was incapacitated, Powell beat and stabbed Seward's military guard. Finally, with the family trying desperately to subdue the powerful Powell, he climbed onto the bed in which Seward lay helpless, and slashed at him maniacally. Fortunately for the Secretary of State, due to the darkness in the room, and the loyal Seward family attempting to fight him off, Seward's life was spared. He was stabbed in the cheek and seriously wounded, but not killed. Powell ultimately

walked out of the residence, unceremoniously stabbing another political aid in the back on his way out of the door, and left the bloodstained Seward residence behind. David Herold, who was assigned the task of waiting outside to guide Powell out of the city, abandoned his post when he heard screaming from the house. Powell walked into the Washington night, mounted his horse, and took off for no place in particular.

Booth, of course, had no way to know how his co-conspirators were faring. As for himself, he was quite pleased with how things had played out at Ford's Theater. Aside from his leg injury, everything had gone just as he had imagined. However, he was far from out of the woods as he traveled through the dark streets of Washington on his way out of the city. After narrowly escaping the clutches of Joseph Stewart in Baptist Alley behind Ford's Theater, Booth's next challenge would be to get out of the city. He steered his rented horse toward the old Navy Yard Bridge which led across the Anacostia River into Maryland. The bridge was guarded by a United States Army Sentry who had orders not to allow nighttime travelers on the bridge. As was the case minutes earlier at the theater, one man, this time Sgt. Silas T Cobb, had an opportunity to terminate Booth's flight. Instead, Booth used his charm and obvious gentlemen's appearance to talk his way across the bridge. Later, co-conspirator David Herold, whose primary role in the company was to serve as a guide through Maryland and Virginia, would also talk his way across the bridge by telling Sgt. Cobb that he was heading out to visit a lady friend. On the late evening of April 14, Booth and Herold set foot in the state of Maryland. They would remain together through the end of their desperate flight.

As Booth and Herold traveled into Maryland, the President lay in his deathbed. After the shooting, the unconscious Lincoln was carried to William Peterson's

boardinghouse down the street from the theater. As doctors hopelessly attended to his mortal wound, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton began the largest manhunt operation the young country had ever seen. Stanton, who had been invaluable to Lincoln in prosecuting the war against the Confederacy, turned his attention almost fully to pursuing those responsible for the attacks on Lincoln and Seward. From the very home where the President lay dying, Stanton began organizing his plan of attack. At 1 o'clock in the morning on the 15<sup>th</sup>, just hours after the shooting, Stanton sent an urgent message to the police chief of New York City requesting that his best detectives be sent immediately to Washington. He further sent the following blunt message to Lt. Col. Lafayette Baker, head of the National Detective Police. "Come here immediately and see if you can find the murderers of the President." The team assembled to track down the assassins would be like nothing police action seen before. In all, 10,000 federal troops, private detectives and city, county and state police would be called into service to track down the assassins. Stanton presided over all, and would not rest until those responsible were captured. And at that moment, those responsible were making their way through the dark Maryland night.

The first stopping point for Booth and Herold was a small inn known as Surratt's Tavern in a tiny town coincidentally named Surrattsville, Maryland. The Tavern was owned by co-conspirator Mary Surratt and her son John Surratt, who operated as a Confederate agent. Booth had previously stashed supplies in the tavern, including a Spencer Carbine rifle, during the time of the failed kidnapping plot. He also enlisted Mary Surratt to deliver additional supplies to the Tavern on the day of the shooting. Surratt's Tavern stood approximately 15 miles from Ford's Theater. Booth and Herold

arrived there in the predawn hours of April 15. After repeated efforts to rouse John Lloyd, the drunken proprietor of the establishment, Booth and Herold were ultimately able to retrieve their supplies, as well as a bottle of whiskey. Booth also had his first opportunity to brag about the incident, telling Lloyd "I am pretty certain that we have assassinated the President and Secretary Seward." The stop at Surratt's Tavern lasted only minutes. Herold and Booth were in a hurry, and had significant business of which they still needed to attend. Of most urgent need, Booth's injured leg required attention, especially considering the grueling flight that lay ahead of him. Fortunately, Booth was acquainted with a doctor in the area.

On April 15, at 4:00 AM, while Lincoln lingered between life and death in a nondescript Washington boardinghouse, John Wilkes Booth and David Herold arrived at the home of Dr. Samuel Mudd near present day Waldorf, Maryland. Despite efforts to rewrite history by those sympathetic to the plight of Samuel Mudd, principally his descendants, the injured man who arrived on Mudd's doorstep that April predawn was no stranger. During the time that Booth was planning the kidnapping plot of Abraham Lincoln, he was given Dr. Mudd's name as a potential sympathetic contact in Maryland. In December of 1864, only a few months prior to the assassination, Booth had visited Mudd in his home. In fact, he spent the night there and attended church with the Mudd family. Dr. Mudd had also returned a visit to Booth in Washington DC. In fact, it was Mudd who introduced Booth to Confederate agent and Tavern owner John Surratt. So despite the later claims of Mudd's defenders, and Mudd's own claim of ignorance to investigators following Booth's visit, Dr. Mudd was keenly aware of who Booth was when he came into his home on April 15. Mudd treated Booth's injury, which he

diagnosed as a broken fibula. He set the broken bone and provided a handmaid splint for Booth. Mudd also provided a bed for Booth and Herold for the evening in his home, which, despite the massive pursuit now obviously on their heels, they gladly accepted. While Booth and Herold rested comfortably in their beds, at 7:22 AM on April 15, 1965, President Abraham Lincoln succumbed to his wounds.

Later that morning, while Booth slept, Dr. Mudd traveled with Herold to nearby Bryantown in search of a mode of transportation for Booth. Specifically, they sought a carriage, which they believed would much better accommodate Booth's injured ankle. Upon entering Bryantown, however, the parties were stunned to see members of the 13<sup>th</sup> New York cavalry already permeating the town. Herold immediately turned back to the Mudd home for fear of being recognized, but Dr. Mudd traveled into town. There, it was confirmed to Mudd that the President had been shot, and that John Wilkes Booth was being sought for the crime. Mudd, more scared for his personal implication with the crime than outraged at it, returned to his home on the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup>, and demanded that Booth and Herold leave at once. His Confederate sympathies did not allow him to hand the conspirators over to the cavalry already assembled in the area, but he could not take further risk. Booth paid Mudd sum of \$25 for his hospitality and medical care, and Booth and Herold left Dr. Mudd's home at 7:00 PM on the April 15<sup>th</sup>.

As would become a theme of Booth's poorly planned escape, Booth and Herold got lost almost immediately after leaving the home of Dr. Mudd. Fortunately for them, they happened across a half African-American half Piscataway Indian by the name of Oswell Swann as they ambled aimlessly through the Maryland countryside. In exchange for the payment of five dollars from Booth, Swann agreed to deliver Booth and Herold to

the home of Capt. Samuel Cox, a contact provided by Dr. Mudd, at a farm called Rich Hill near Bel Alton, Maryland. With the help of their guide, they arrived at Capt. Cox's estate at 1:00 AM on April 16, Easter morning. Though weary and injured, Booth sees himself at this point as a heroic and noble southern figure, and he expects unquestioned hospitality from Southern gentlemen he encounters during his escape from the Union. For the first of several occasions, he is disappointed on this Easter Sunday at the home of Samuel Cox. Capt. Cox, who has heard about the assassination, knows who Booth and Herold are. He allows them to briefly come into the home, and provides food for them, but will not allow them to remain inside his house. Instead, he hurriedly feeds them and ushers them to a thickly wooded area approximately a quarter mile from his home in a heavy thicket of pine trees, and calls a trusted Confederate agent for his assistance. That agent, Thomas Jones, becomes the greatest ally that Booth and Herold will have throughout their tumultuous journey.

Thomas Jones was the James Bond of the Confederacy in rural Maryland. He spent nearly the entire war smuggling Confederate information and spies back and forth across the Potomac River between Virginia and Maryland. In doing so, he performed an invaluable service at the doorstep of the nation's capital, and he was good at it. It was reputed that he was never once caught with smuggled information or an individual. It was this expertise that led Capt. Cox to immediately contact Thomas Jones. Jones met with Herold and Booth at about 9:00 AM on Easter Sunday and analyzed their dire situation. With years of espionage experience, his advice was counterintuitive to Herold and Booth. Charles County was flooded with federal troops and private investigators searching for the fugitives. Every fiber of their beings told them to run for the river and

the hope of sanctuary in Virginia. Thomas Jones' advice was just the opposite. Wait. Jones told the assassins that he would help, but that they would have to follow his instructions precisely. They would remain in the pine thicket until he determined it was the right time to cross. There would be no warm beds or even a campfire. Jones would provide them with food and any other basic necessities, but otherwise, they must lay in wait in the relative safety of the pine thicket. Herold and Booth did not like the advice, but they had no choice but to accept it. Jones was true to his word, bringing food and newspapers, which Booth had specifically requested, to the two conspirators as they waited. In all, Herold and Booth kept their uncomfortable camp with little more than a couple of riding blankets for five days and four nights.

As very little happened in the pine thicket, much happened in the country, all wrought by Booth's tyranny. Though the investigation spearheaded by Stanton had not yet uncovered Booth's hiding place, it had made tangible progress. Co-conspirators Mary Surratt, Lewis Powell and George Atzerodt were all arrested during Booth's purgatory in the pine thicket. Their intensive questioning would reveal nearly every detail of Booth's plot. Lincoln's funeral also took place as his killers hid in the Maryland woods. It was also during this time that Booth bitterly learned through the newspapers brought to him by Thomas Jones of another less tangible byproduct of his attack. Specifically, the newspaper accounts detailed that no one was celebrating Booth as a war hero as Booth had anticipated. His actions were seen as criminal and heinous rather than heroic and patriotic. Undoubtedly most galling to Booth, he began to realize that his actions had made Abraham Lincoln, who was until very recently still seen by many Americans in a negative light, a martyr.

In utter frustration, Booth, as he lay uncomfortably in the Maryland woods, drafted in his diary a manifesto that he hoped would someday glorify his criminal act. *Until today nothing was ever thought of sacrificing to our country's wrongs. For six months we had worked to capture. But our cause being almost lost, something decisive and great must be done. But its failure was owing to others, who did not strike for their country with a heart. I struck boldly and not as the papers say. I walked with a firm step through a thousand of his friends, was stopped, but pushed on. A colonel was at his side. I shouted semper before I fired. In jumping broke my leg. I passed all his pickets, rode sixty miles that night, the bone of my leg tearing the flesh at every jump. I can never repent it, though we hated to kill; our country owed all her troubles to him, and God simply made me the instrument of his punishment. The country is not what it was. This forced union is not what I have loved. I care not what becomes of me. I have no desire to out-live my country....*

On the evening of April 20, after five days and four nights in the pine thicket, Thomas Jones informed Booth and Herold that it was time to make for the Potomac. However, the road would not be easy. There had been a near miss in the pine thicket when a federal cavalry company traveled within 200 yards of Booth and Herold during their extended campout. Warning against their position being revealed by the sound or movement of their horses, Jones instructed Herold to dispose of them. Herold complied with the request, killed both horses, and sunk them in nearby quicksand. The death of these two horses would be Herold's only direct act of violence in the entire saga. Though dispatching the horses assisted in concealing their location, it left them without ready means of travel for the 3 ½ mile hike to the Potomac River. Jones therefore



allowed Booth to ride on his horse while he walked ahead of the company to guide the way to the river. This made travel arduous, but the company ultimately reached the banks in the late evening of April 20.

For the final time, Thomas Jones provided aid to Booth and Herold by providing them with a small skiff, directions and friendly contacts in the state of Virginia. The plan was to cross the Potomac approximately two miles to Machodoc Creek, Virginia. There, they would find a female Confederate operative by the name of Elizabeth Quesenberry. The pair pushed off into the dark river away from Thomas Jones, a man who had almost single-handedly kept at bay the massive hunting party bearing down on the assassins. Booth would find other sympathizers to help him along the way, but would never find an ally as capable as Jones.

Once out of the capable hands of their protector, Booth and Herold returned to their customary habit of bungling their escape. Unaccustomed to the dark river or its currents, Herold rowed the skiff most of the night in completely the wrong direction. When they reached landfall in the early morning hours of April 21, Herold realized that they were not in Virginia, but instead, still in Maryland. Though this was obviously a setback, Herold knew the area and was aware of a contact he was certain would be sympathetic to his cause. Booth and Herold traveled to the home of Confederate sympathizer John Hughes, again expecting the warm embrace of Southern hospitality. Again, they were disappointed. Hughes did feed the ragged pair, now a full week on the run, but would not allow them to stay in his home. Instead, Booth and Herold, finally free of the pine thicket, were forced to again sleep in the wilderness, this time along the riverbank near the skiff.

A dejected Booth penned a journal entry under the simple caption "swamp" to describe his mood.

*After being hunted like a dog through swamps, woods, and last night being chased by gunboats till I was forced to return wet cold and starving, with every man's hand against me, I am here in despair. And why; for doing what Brutus was honored for, for what made Tell a hero. And yet I for striking down a greater tyrant than they ever knew them am looked upon as a common cutthroat. My action was purer than either of theirs. One hoped to be great himself. The other had not only his country's but his own wrongs to avenge. I hoped for no gain. I knew no private wrong. I struck for my country and that alone. A country groaned beneath this tyranny and prayed for this end. Yet now behold the cold hand the extend me. God cannot pardon me if I have done wrong. Yet I cannot see any wrong except in serving a degenerate people. The little, very little I left behind to clear my name, the government will not allow to be printed. So ends all. For my country I have given up all that makes life suite and holy, brought misery upon my family, and ensure there is no pardon in the heaven for me since man condemns me so. I have only heard of what has been done (except what I did myself) and it fills me with horror. God try and forgive me, and blessed my mother. Tonight I will once more try the river with the intent to cross; though I have a greater desire and almost a mind to return to Washington and in a measure clear my name, which I feel I can do. I do not repent the blow I struck. I may before God but not to man.*

*I think I have done well, though I am abandoned, with the curse of Cain upon me, when if the world knew my heart, that one blow would've made me great, though I did desire no greatness.*

*Tonight I tried to escape these bloodhounds once more. Who, who can read his fate God's will be done.*

*I have too great a soul to die like a criminal. Oh may he, may he spare me that and let me die bravely.*

*I bless the entire world. Have never hated or wronged anyone. This last was not a wrong, unless God deems it so. And it's with him to damn or bless me. And for this brave boy with me who often praise (yes, before and since) with a true and sincere heart, was it a crime in him, if so, why can he pray the same "I do not wish to shed a drop of blood, but I must fight the course." Tis all that's left of me.*

For reasons that remain unclear, other than perhaps to give time for Booth to pen his melodramatic journal entry, the pair chooses not to leave on the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> to try again for Virginia. Instead, Booth and Herold spend that night and all day of April 22 on the Maryland bank of the Potomac River. On the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, they make their second attempt to cross. After drifting perilously close to a union gunboat, the pair finally successfully cross the river and arrive in the state of Virginia on the morning of April 23, nine days after the assassination. Booth clearly believed that this was a landing to be celebrated, as he believed Virginia, a stronghold of the Confederacy, would welcome him. Again, he would be sorely disappointed as he would receive little hospitality in Virginia and would ultimately face the end of his journey in this once Southern stronghold.

On the morning of April 23, Booth and Herold managed to locate the home of Elizabeth Quesenberry, the female agent for the Confederacy whose contact

information had been provided by Thomas Jones. Throughout the war, she had stashed both individuals and information on her Virginia farm. Now, Booth hoped she would provide him the same courtesy. But as he had faced throughout his journey, he was disappointed to learn that Ms. Quesenberry would not allow him to stay in her home. Instead, she provided food, but again required the pair to remain in the woods. Ms. Quisenberry did, however, provide contact with two Confederate agents who agreed to assist Booth and Herold as they traveled toward their next destination, the home of Dr. Richard Stuart. Booth's throbbing leg needed attention, and he hoped Dr. Stuart, like Dr. Mudd before him, would treat Booth's injuries and provide needed shelter.

Booth and Herold did not reveal their true identity upon arriving at Richard Stuart's home at approximately 8 PM on April 23. Instead, they told Stewart that they were Confederate soldiers returning home from battle, and that Booth had a war injury that needed attention. Stewart, who clearly saw through the ruse, would have none of it. Like most supposed supporters who Booth encountered, he provided food, but refused to allow Booth and Herold to stay in his residence. Moreover, Stuart refused to attend the Booth's leg. To add insult to injury, the only shelter that Stuart would provide was the home of his black servant, John Lucas. After arriving at the home to find the family sleeping, Booth angrily brandished a knife at the Lucas family and forced them out of their own home to give him ample room to rest. Booth never forgave Stewart for what he perceived to be the great slight of making him sleep in a servant's shack.

On the morning of April 24, Booth paid John Lucas' son Charles to transport him via wagon to Port Conway, where he hoped to cross the Rappahannock River to Port Royal, Virginia. Upon arriving at Port Conway, Booth and Herold were alarmed to see

three soldiers milling about the ferry. With great relief, they observed the three uniformed men to be Confederate soldiers. With an opportunity to again be the star of his own production, Booth confessed his identity to the soldiers. Possibly for the same reasons that the Washington conspirators fell so easily beneath Booth's control, the soldiers agreed to help in Booth's flight from the law. After crossing the Rappahannock River, one of the three soldiers, William Jett, took Booth and Herold to a home of a friend, who he believed would take Booth and Herold in. Booth and Herold were spurned on this occasion not because they had just committed the most infamous criminal act American history, but because of southern social convention. Specifically, the men of the house were away on business, leaving only the women to care for the home. The women were understanding of the plight of these two haggard southern soldiers, but would not think of allowing men to stay in the home alone with women. Therefore, once again, southern hospitality failed Booth. Booth and Herold were sent down the road to the place that would be the last stop on this journey, the farm of Richard Garrett.

Booth and Herold arrived at the Garrett farm at 3:00 PM on April 24. As they had at previous stops in Virginia, Booth and Herold used the ruse that they were returning Confederate soldiers. However, unlike most of the stops on their journey, Richard Garrett's hospitality did not disappoint. He immediately brought the two weary travelers into his home, fed them, and put them up for the night. It was the first time that Booth and Herold would sleep in a bed since Dr. Mudd's home some ten days prior. Booth and Herold would spend a leisurely day on the 25<sup>th</sup> dining with the Garrett family and even playing with the children. It was certainly the most enjoyable leg of their journey. But

unbeknownst to them, it was also their most perilous. The 16<sup>th</sup> New York cavalry was hot on their trail.

Secretary of War Stanton had put Lieut. Edwin Doherty in command of the New York 16<sup>th</sup> with the express purpose of tracking down Booth along the Potomac. On April 25, the company received their first great lead when they were told by the ferryman at Port Royal that men matching Booth and Herold's description had crossed the Rappahannock only one day prior. An even more promising tip was given when it was revealed that the two men were in the company of confederate soldier William Jett, and that Jett could be found at a certain brothel in Bowling Green, Virginia. Doherty and the 16<sup>th</sup> New York took immediate flight to Bowling Green to find Jett, who they hoped would lead them to the assassins. Little did they know that during the flight, the entire division rode immediately past the Garrett farm, not 100 yards from Herold and Booth, who stood awestruck in the yard and watched them pass.

Despite what should have been a very ominous sign, Herold and Booth decided they did not wish to take immediate flight. They were enjoying their time on the Garrett farm and decided to spend the night on the 25<sup>th</sup> before leaving the next day. At this point, the Garrett hospitality was wavering, as the family became very suspicious of Booth and Herold. In fact, on the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup>, the Garretts refused to allow the pair to sleep again in the farmhouse, instead relegating them to the family's tobacco barn. Once inside the barn, Richard Garrett's son, John, took the precaution of locking the barn door from the outside. This was not because he necessarily believed these men to be the assassins of Abraham Lincoln, but because he was afraid that the suspicious pair would steal the family's horses.

As this drama unfolded on the Garrett farm, the 16<sup>th</sup> New York burst in on a very surprised William Jett, along with his female companion, at the tavern in Bowling Green, Virginia. Jett immediately spilled his guts about Booth and Herold and went so far as to offer to lead the company to the Garrett farm. Lieut. Doherty took him up on this generous, if somewhat coerced, offer.

On April 26, at 2:30 AM, 26 cavalry soldiers of the 16<sup>th</sup> New York, and their commander, arrived with the guidance of former Confederate soldier William Jett to the Garrett farmhouse. After briefly denying that anyone meeting the description of the fugitives was present, which resulted in an immediate threat of hanging, Richard Garrett informed Lieut. Doherty that the men he wanted were in his tobacco barn. Booth and Herold awoke with a start at the thundering hooves of the cavalry, but were unable to escape the barn due to the fact that the Garretts had locked them in. The barn was surrounded and escape was hopeless. Still, Booth was not going to go down easily. Booth used every theatrical trick in his arsenal in communicating with the soldiers through the walls of the barn. He feigned ignorance of the entire event, telling the soldiers that he did not know who they were looking for. That plan failing, he attempted to use his charm to convince the cavalry to give him a sporting chance. He even attempted to threaten violence against them despite the hopeless numbers against him.

The young David Herold did not compose himself nearly as well. Afraid, and not wishing to die in a gunfight, Herold pled with Booth to give up. Naively, Herold reasoned that since he did not directly inflict violence on the President, that he would be spared serious criminal repercussions. Eventually, Booth granted Herold permission to walk out the barn, stating to the commander "Let him out. That young man is innocent."

Ultimately, Herold's surrender was accepted, and he was taken into custody by the 16<sup>th</sup> New York.

The situation with Booth was not nearly as under control. It was still night as the negotiations continued, but at daylight, Booth would have easy shooting opportunities at the soldiers perched outside the barn. Something had to be done. Commander Doherty ordered the barn to be lit on fire in hopes of flushing Booth out. This tact worked. The wooden barn quickly becoming engulfed in flame, Booth began to make his way towards the door. However, Booth did not intend his escape from the burning barn to be a surrender. Instead, he prepared his pistols for one final fight.

Booth did not count on the mercurial Sgt. Boston Corbett of the 16<sup>th</sup> New York. To say Boston Corbett was an unusual man does not do him justice. Corbett was a religious zealot whose faith led to some truly bizarre behavior. For example, several years prior to the night that he encountered John Wilkes Booth at the Garrett farm, Corbett had been delivering the Lord's word in streets of Boston when he caught sight of a local lady of the night. Feeling himself involuntarily aroused at the site of the prostitute, he knew he must take action. He then went to his home, and in an effort to stave off sin, castrated himself. Following his home surgery, Corbett attended an evening prayer session and took a walk around town before going to the hospital for follow-up surgery. The Lord had now led Boston Corbett to John Wilkes Booth, and Booth was in the crosshairs of Corbett's rifle.

From the inception of the manhunt, Secretary of War Stanton had made it clear that he wanted Booth and the other conspirators taken alive. He wanted the show of



their trial and execution. He did not want them martyred or any questions regarding their death. But orders meant very little to Boston Corbett compared to the will of God. And it was the will of God, according to Boston Corbett, that made him take action in the early morning hours of April 26. As Booth began to move towards the door, Corbett saw what he believed to be an act of aggression, most specifically, Booth raising his firearm as if to begin firing against a fellow soldier. Corbett did not want innocent blood, and so he took aim, and fired his rifle at Booth.

The ball from Corbett's rifle, coincidentally enough, struck Booth within approximately an inch of where Booth struck the President twelve days prior. The shot severed Booth's spinal cord, and death was imminent. Booth lingered for approximately three hours before his end, slipping in and out of consciousness. He was paralyzed from the spinal injury, but was able to communicate to some degree. He asked his attendants to tell his mother he died for his country. Then, just before death, he asked to see his hands. Looking up at the now lifeless instruments, which Booth previously believed would help topple the Union, he muttered "useless, useless" and died.

In a clear dichotomy to the magnificent splendor of Lincoln's funeral, Booth was unceremoniously wrapped in a Union army blanket and tied to the back of a ramshackle wagon, where he was carried back towards Washington by a poor African-American farmer, his death wound dripping blood on the road as he traveled slowly back towards the nation's capital.

On July 7, 1865, less than three months following the death of the President, Mary Surratt, Lewis Powell, John Atzerodt and Booth's faithful traveling partner, David

Herold, died by execution after trial by military tribunal. Dr. Mudd, as well as other members of the original Lincoln kidnapping plot, were given life sentences, but were ultimately pardoned by then President Andrew Johnson in 1869. Aside from Dr. Mudd, no other individual who aided Booth in his flight from Washington were convicted of crimes.

As a final bit of vengeance against Booth, killer of his President, Edwin Stanton had Booth's body buried in an unmarked grave at the old arsenal army post outside of Washington. Stanton had put an entire war on hold to focus his attention on the capture of the most notorious criminal in American history. Now that his manhunt had succeeded, he did not want to see Booth attain, even in death, the personal glory he sought from his vile act. Stanton would instead ensure that history would see Booth's desperate act consistently with Booth's dying words, "useless, useless."