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William A. Tidwell. *April '65: Confederate Covert Action in the American Civil War.* Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995. xvi + 264 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87338-515-2.

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Brigadier General Tidwell returns in *April '65* to both the subject and the thesis of which he wrote in 1989 with James O. Hall and David Winfred Gaddy in *Come Retribution.* The general's subject is the Confederacy's conduct of clandestine warfare. His thesis is that John Wilkes Booth acted as a witting agent of Jefferson Davis when the actor shot President Lincoln. As a career intelligence officer, General Tidwell brings late-twentieth-century intelligence techniques and judgments to mid-nineteenth-century evidence, masterfully uncovered and painstakingly collected. The product is an easy read, an informative study, and a nearly persuasive delation.

General Tidwell continues in *April '65* to argue that the capacity of the Confederacy for secret warfare was much greater than historians have so far admitted, sophisticated enough to have produced an operations order directing the capture or death of Lincoln and other high Union officials. To prove a substantially greater Confederate special operations capacity, Tidwell again recounts Rose Greenhow's spying in Washington, the Secret Line's communications across the Potomac, the Secret Signal Corps's employment of encoded semaphore, Colonel Mosby's forays behind Union lines, and operations by Canadian-based agents to assist the Copperheads and liberate Confederate prisoners of war.

New in this book are a detailed examination of surviving Confederate Treasury warrants, related by the author to intelligence and covert operations, and a thorough and engaging account of the wartime exploits of Bernard Janin Sage, a New Orleans lawyer who enthusiastically promoted to President Davis and others in the Confederacy's high command the benefits of privateering and sabotage, both in America and abroad. Relating Treasury warrants to requests associated with two secret accounts exclusively controlled by President Davis and Secretary of State Benjamin, and comparing the timing of activity in those accounts with that of particular episodes of secret warfare, makes a persuasive case that, as the author puts it, the director of central intelligence for the Confederacy was its president. The story of Sage's futile attempt to interest the Confederacy in a new modus operandi for naval privateers would alone be enough to commend this book. Ultimately, however, *April '65* can do no more to prove that the Confederacy could conduct secret warfare than did *Come Retribution*, and, when it comes to connecting Jefferson Davis with John Wilkes Booth, the new book suffers from the same overambitious reach as its predecessor.

The Secret Line's trans-Potomac operations, Rose Greenhow's spying, and Mosby's sorties behind Union lines illustrate a wide range of intelligence-gathering activities, but not covert action per se. Proving that the Confederacy could collect overt intelligence from smuggled northern newspapers, pry secrets from loose-lipped Yankees, and return tactical intelligence from long range reconnaissance patrols contributes little to proving the Confederacy would or could stage a complicated mission to terminate with extreme prejudice those at the pinnacle of the Union chain of command. Even the author's two covert action examples, acts of sabotage by explosives experts from the Army's Torpedo Bureau, and Great Lakes operations to liberate prisoners of war, prove little about the South's capacity for the "wet work" of sneak attacks on persons. Indeed, the closer General Tidwell comes in citing examples relevant to Confederate covert-action capacities or predilections, the more he must admit their failure.

On the other hand, General Tidwell's account of one failed mission does persuade that Jefferson Davis did order wet work. On April 10, 1865, units of the 8th Illinois cavalry engaged a force of Mosby's Rangers near Burke, Virginia, capturing several, including Lieutenant Thomas F. Harney. Harney was not a Ranger, but a saboteur who had reported to Mosby only the week before. Tidwell argues persuasively that Harney was sent to blow up the White House during a council of war, and that Mosby was ordered both to insert the bomber behind Union lines and to provide a diversion for that maneuver. As a pris-

oner, Harney must have kept silent regarding his mission, and the Illinois cavalry seems not to have captured suspicious munitions that might have incriminated him as a bomber. Tidwell also makes an excellent case for the proposition that such orders to Harney and Mosby could only have come from the Confederacy's national command authority, i.e., President Davis.

General Tidwell uses Lieutenant Harney's mission to prove John Wilkes Booth was commissioned by Jefferson Davis and the Confederate government. Here, he goes too far. According to Tidwell, Davis first directed Booth to kidnap Lincoln and then directed Harney to explode him, the former through Canada-based operatives to whom Davis transmitted the order via courier John Surratt; the latter by orders directly from headquarters in Richmond. Tidwell does not assert that Davis later ordered Booth to kill Lincoln, but only that the actor acted of his own initiative after Harney's capture, availing himself afterward of Harney's escape plan. Only if Booth acted officially, argues Tidwell, could the actor have known of the Confederate plan to blow up the White House. According to Tidwell, Booth assumed Harney's mission and followed its escape route after shooting Lincoln.

Two objections arise to this theory: one legal, the other operational. First, that Davis ordered Harney's mission does not prove Davis ordered Booth either to kidnap or to kill. The two escapades are profoundly different according to the law of nations. Harney's mission comported with the law of war as recognized between belligerent sovereigns; Booth's did not. For lawful combatants, military personnel were legitimate targets, even of sneak attack. Thus, for Harney, a soldier (presumably in proper uniform, as he was treated as a prisoner of war), the commander in chief of the opposing armies and his immediate successors and subordinates were lawful targets for capture or explosion. For civilians like Booth and his henchmen, most of them citizens of a loyal state, unattached to regular or paramilitary units, the law of war granted no corresponding right to capture or attack, but condemned treachery, and authorized its punishment by death. Because Jefferson Davis and Judah Benjamin consistently aspired to recognition of the Confederate States of America as a belligerent sovereign, complying with international law mattered much more in Richmond than in Washington, where the rebellion was viewed as domestic and the rebels as lawbreakers. Thus, while President Davis might have ordered Lieutenant Harney's attack, it is more likely Davis would have condemned Booth's actions than it is that he would have approved them.

General Tidwell also relies on what he believes were the specifics of Harney's plan to prove Booth must have been officially sanctioned. Otherwise, argues the General, how could the actor have known about an escape route prepared especially for Harney? It is simpler to conclude the actor knew nothing of Harney's mission, or that what happened during Booth's flight proves nothing about what the actor could have known. It overtaxes credulity to argue that a second commando (Harney) was to be extracted, in the same way, along the same route through southern Maryland, so soon after the first (Booth, after attempting Lincoln's capture). Moreover, the most fundamental tenet of operational security would have dictated compartmentalization of Booth's kidnap mission and Harney's bomb mission. That compartmentalization would surely have included a different extraction plan for each team. To argue the contrary based on Confederate naivete in special operations planning, would be to abandon the assumption underlying all that the author has set out before.

What happened to Booth once he reached southern Maryland also refutes General Tidwell's contention that Booth was passed toward Richmond along a line of Confederate operatives positioned to assist Harney. According to the general, nearly thirty of Mosby's Rangers crossed into Maryland on the night after Lincoln was shot, blundering into a Union patrol only four miles or so from where Booth was hiding. Tidwell argues that this force, ignorant of Harney's capture five days earlier, was in Union territory to return him safely behind Confederate lines, and that the skirmish drove it off, preventing a rendezvous with Booth. Sending a mounted force (of a size ill suited for clandestine, nighttime operations) into heavily guarded territory to recover a single fleeing agent seems more likely to draw unwanted attention than to ensure the agent's successful extraction. For the secret conveying of persons across the Potomac into Confederate hands, local cadres manning the Secret Line had served admirably, according to Tidwell, employing stealth rather than force, evading rather than confronting the enemy. Putting Mosby's horse soldiers on the wrong side of the Potomac seems an unwarranted departure from what had proven so successful in the past.

The size of the Confederate force surprised in St. Mary's County that night also contrasts with that of elements on what the author contends was the same route south and west of the Potomac. By Tidwell's account, nearly thirty troopers were sent into Maryland to link with Harney, but when Booth appeared at the next stop en route, he found only "Captain" Samuel Cox and his

overseer. Booth's escorts from Cox's farm to Garrett's barn never numbered more than two or three at a time. If Harney was important enough for thirty Rangers to infiltrate Maryland, why did a fellow agent warrant so few escorts down the road? Indeed, Booth's passage of the Potomac was left entirely to him and Herold, with no assistance from the regular Confederate Army units which, according to General Tidwell, had moved Confederate persons and material regularly across the same stretch of water, under Union noses, for years. Given the intricacies the author asserts in connection with Lieutenant Harney's insertion, this haphazard extraction seems an unlikely component of the same plan. Perhaps Mosby' Rangers were in Maryland to rescue Harney on the night of April 15, but that escape plan surely had little in common with the trans-Potomac route and network of which Booth and Herold took advantage.

General Tidwell would have us believe that the Confederacy excelled at secret warfare, and therefore agree that the Confederacy could have recruited, trained, and directed John Wilkes Booth. The General tells an engrossing story of covert operations, but the better he paints Confederate special warfare directors, the more he calls into question the notion that they would or did have much to do with John Wilkes Booth. It is easy to support a positive assessment of secret capabilities by arguing that only the failures among covert operations become public, or by pointing to misinformation as the real motive behind denials (like General Ewell's sweeping disavowal to General Grant). However, the burden, it seems to me, lies with the party asserting the revisionist view, and, in *April '65*, General Tidwell has come just shy of carrying it for his claim that John Wilkes Booth was a witting agent of Jefferson Davis. The author's splendid attempt, however, makes compelling reading along the way.

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