



# CHAPTER 2

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## *The Civil War: Lack of a Centralized Direction*

### **Introduction**

Six weeks after the election of Abraham Lincoln as President, South Carolina seceded from the Union. In February 1861, six other states (Louisiana, Texas, Georgia, Alabama, Florida and Mississippi) followed. They formed the Confederate States of America. When President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers after Fort Sumter was fired upon in April, 1861, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina and Tennessee joined the Confederacy. The Civil War had begun.

When hostilities began, neither the North nor the South had any significant intelligence or counterintelligence capability. Generals operated their own espionage rings and personally recruited and directed their spies. In Washington, President Lincoln was concerned. He only had to look outside his window to realize that the capital was penetrated and surrounded by southern sympathizers. Although Maryland stayed loyal to the Union, many of its citizens favored the southern cause.

To protect the federal government, Secretary of State William H. Seward took the initiative. Under his direction, southern spies, sympathizers and others were arrested and detained as threats to the government. When General George McClellan was appointed commander of the Union Army, Allan Pinkerton and his detectives replaced Seward in his role as counterintelligence chief. Pinkerton was very effective in stopping the flow of intelligence out of the capital to the Confederacy.

In November 1862, Lincoln removed McClellan and replaced him with General Ambrose Burnside. With McClellan's dismissal, Pinkerton left Washington and his counterintelligence role to protect the city was given to Lafayette Baker. At the time, Baker was working for the War Department, targeting contraband channels. Like Pinkerton, Baker was successful in neutralizing southern agents and sympathizers.

The Confederacy did not formerly establish a Secret Service Bureau until 30 November 1864; the war would be over on 9 April 1865. The full extent of the Confederacy's counterintelligence operations and activities remain a mystery because Judah Benjamin, the Secretary of State for the confederacy, burned all espionage records as the Union Army entered Richmond.

## William H. Seward<sup>1</sup>

When the Lincoln Administration suddenly found itself faced with open hostilities and accompanying espionage and spy intrigues in 1861, one of the first officials to react to the situation was Secretary of State Seward. His organization combined both the police function—pursing individuals with a view to their incarceration and prosecution—and the intelligence function—gathering information regarding the loyalty and political views of citizens without any particular regard for possible violations of the law. In combining the two tasks, of course, their distinction often became lost. One commentator notes:

*The Government's first efforts to control the civilian population were conducted by the Secretary of State for reasons both personal and official. William H. Seward, the "Premier" of the Cabinet, had an unquenchable zeal for dabbling in everyone else's business. In addition, since the establishment of the Federal Government the office of the Secretary of State had been somewhat of a catchall for duties no other executive agency was designed to handle. With the war, and the new problem of subversion on the home front, Seward soon began to busy himself about arrests of political prisoners, their incarceration, and then the next step of setting up secret agents to ferret them out.<sup>2</sup>*

There are no informative records as to how or why the initial arrests of political prisoners and the creation



*William H. Seward*

of a secret service fell to Secretary Seward. It is entirely likely that he requested these duties. The more important consideration, however, concerns the extent to which he responsibly carried out these obligations. According to one of the Secretary's biographers:

*Arrests were made for any one of many reasons: where men were suspected of having given, or intending to give, aid or comfort to the enemy in any substantial way,—as by helping in the organization of troops, by supplying arms or provisions, or selling the bonds of the states in secession; by public or private communications that opposed United States enlistment or encouraged those of the Confederacy; by expressing sympathy with the South or attacking the administration; by belonging to organizations designed to obstruct the progress of the war—in fact for almost any act that indicated a desire to see the government fail in its effort to conquer disunion.<sup>3</sup>*

But the question was not simply one of fact. The manner and nature of the arrest and detention of political offenders raised a number of due process considerations.

The person suspected of disloyalty was often seized at night, searched, borne off to the nearest fort, deprived of his valuables, and locked up in a casemate, or in a battery generally crowded with men that had had similar experiences. It was not rare for arrests regarded as political to be made by order of the Secretary of War or of some military officer; but, with only a few exceptions, these prisoners came under the control of the Secretary of State just as if he had taken the original action.

For a few days the newcomer usually voiced varied reflection and loud denunciation of the administration. But the discomforts of his confinement soon led him to seek his freedom. When he resolved to send for friends and an attorney, he was informed that the rules forbade visitors, except in rare instances, that attorneys were entirely excluded and the prisoner who sought their aid would greatly prejudice his case. Only unsealed letters would be forwarded, and if they contained objectionable statements they were returned

to the writer or filed in the Department of State with other papers relating to the case.

There still remained a possibility, it was generally assumed, of speedy relief by appeal to the Secretary in person. Then a long narrative, describing the experiences of a man whose innocence was equaled only by his misfortunes, was addressed to the nervous, wiry, all-powerful man keeping watch over international relations, political offenders, and affairs generally. The letter was read by the Chief Clerk or Assistant Secretary, and then merely filed. A second, third, and fourth petition for liberation and explanations was sent to the department—but with no result save that the materials for the study of history and human nature were thereby enlarged; the Secretary was calm in the belief that the man was a plotter and could do no harm while he remained in custody.<sup>4</sup>

To rectify this situation, two important steps were taken in February 1862. On St. Valentine's Day, an Executive order was issued providing for the wholesale release of most political prisoners, excepting only "persons detained as spies in the service of the insurgent, or others whose release at the present moment may be deemed incompatible with the public safety."<sup>5</sup> In addition, a special review panel, consisting of Judge Edwards Pierpont and General John A. Dix, was established to expedite releases under this directive.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to intelligence activities, Seward apparently employed Allan Pinkerton for such operations during the summer of 1861, "but did not keep him long, perhaps because he felt that the detective was too close to the President, and Seward wanted his own man, whose loyalty would be direct to him."<sup>7</sup> A listening post was sought in Canada for purposes of checking on the activities of Confederate agents and to monitor the trend of sentiment in British North America during the secession crisis.<sup>8</sup> Former Massachusetts Congressman George Ashmun was appointed special agent to Canada for three months in early 1861 at a salary of \$10 a day plus expenses. Seward advanced \$500 cash on account. Another operative, Charles S. Ogden, took residence in Quebec and additional stations were subsequently established at Halifax and St. John's, among other seaports.<sup>9</sup>

A domestic network also came into being while the Canadian group struggled to recruit confidential agents.

Seward's "Secret Service Letter Book" for 1861 was full of inquiries dispatched to friends and trusted official associates throughout the country asking them to discover persons who could be put on important investigating tasks. He wanted "a discreet and active" man for the Northern frontier, to arrest spies seeking entrance from Canada, and offered to pay such a man \$100 a month. A little later he appointed a special agent at Niagara Falls, to examine the persons coming over the Suspension Bridge, and seize and hold any whom seemed suspicious. He sought, without immediate results, a good man for Chicago and another for Detroit. He authorized the United States Marshall at Boston to employ two detectives for two-month's time, each at \$150 a month. This was particularly urgent; therefore let the Marshall consult the governor of the State, "and take effective measures to break up the business of making and sending shoes for the Rebel Army."<sup>10</sup>

Almost unnoticed, Seward's intelligence organization began to grow; though its agents often proved to be ineffective amateurs. Shortly, however, professionalism, discipline, and a careful sense of mission came to the Secretary's spy corps in the person of Lafayette Charles Baker.

### **Allan Pinkerton<sup>11</sup>**

Allan Pinkerton (1819-1884), a Scottish immigrant, is best known as the founder of the Pinkerton detective agency, one of the most famous organizations of its kind. Pinkerton emigrated to Chicago in 1842 and moved to Dundee, Kane County, Illinois in 1843. After apprehending a gang of counterfeiters, he was appointed deputy sheriff of Kane County in 1846 and immediately afterward of Cook County, headquartered in Chicago. There he organized a force of detectives to counter theft of railroad property, and in 1850 he established the North Western Police Detective agency, later renamed Pinkerton's National Detective Agency.



*A group of Union Spies.*



*Members of the Bureau of Military Information, Army of the Potomac.*

Pinkerton also was an important player in intelligence gathering during the Civil War years of 1861 and 1862 when he organized a system of obtaining military information in the Southern states. Pinkerton recorded his exploits as a Union operative, under the *nom-de-plume* of Major E. J. Allen, in the book, *The Spy of the Rebellion: Being a True History of the Spy System of the United States Army During the Late Rebellion*, published in 1883. Unfortunately for the historian, the book was published after Pinkerton lost his records during the Chicago fire of 1871. The majority of his narrative relied upon his few remaining notes, official reports, and his memory of events that had occurred 20 years before. The book also served the purpose of refuting claims that Pinkerton's spies had provided inflated numbers of Confederate troops, a claim that has become an accepted part of Civil War history.

Pinkerton felt the need to defend his spy system's record during the first years of the war and his close association with Major General George B. McClellan. Pinkerton had been well acquainted with McClellan before the Civil War, during his years as railroad detective when McClellan was president of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad.

Pinkerton began his intelligence activity before President-elect Lincoln's arrival in Washington, D.C. for his inauguration in 1861. Pinkerton had received a letter from Samuel H. Felton, the president of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad, warning of a plan to disrupt Lincoln's trip by destroying rail transportation between Washington, D.C. and cities in the west and north. In response, Pinkerton dispatched surveillance agents along the roads, selecting places where intelligence indicated there were secessionist supporters. He also employed two agents to infiltrate secessionist groups, one of whom learned of plans to assassinate Lincoln as he passed through Baltimore, Maryland.

These agents established their credibility through ethnic ties, collegiate studies, foreign travel, knowledge of foreign languages, familiarity with local customs and prominent individuals, vocal support for secessionist causes, and participation in secret secessionist societies. They discovered that the conspirators, in league with members of the Baltimore

police force, planned to assassinate Lincoln as he rode in an open carriage for a half-mile between the Northern Central Railroad Station to the Washington depot.

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### Pinkerton Letter

*Chicago, April 21st 1861*  
To His Excellence  
A Lincoln, Pres. of the U-S

Dear Sir

When I saw you last I said that if the time should ever come that I could be of service to you I was ready-If that time has come I am on hand.

I have in my Force from Sixteen to Eighteen persons on whose courage, Skill & Devotion to their Country I can rely. If they with myself at the head can be of service in the way of obtaining information of the movements of the Traitors, or Safely conveying your letters or dispatches, or that class of Secret Service which is the most dangerous, I am at your command-

In the present disturbed state of Affairs I dare not trust this to the mail-so send by one of My Force who was with me at Baltimore-You may safely trust him with any message for me-Written or Verbal-I fully guarantee his fidelity-He will act as you direct-and return here with your answer.

Secrecy is the great lever, I propose to operate with-Hence the necessity of this movement (If you contemplate it) being kept Strictly Private-and that should you desire another interview with the Bearer that you should so arrange it-as that he will not be noticed.

The Bearer will hand you A Copy of A Telegraph Cipher which you may use if you desire to Telegraph me-

My Force comprises both Sexes-All of Good Character-And well Skilled in their Business.

Respectfully yours,

Allan Pinkerton

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In a tale with as many twists and turns as any good spy novel, Lincoln is secretly whisked from a public appearance in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, by a special train to Philadelphia, then through the “lines of treason” in Baltimore and safely on to Washington, D.C. Key to the success of this plan was Pinkerton’s arrangement to have the telegraph lines out of Harrisburg cut so that news of Lincoln’s abrupt departure was contained. He also detained two journalists by force of arms from immediately reporting the plan and assumed responsibility for the security of the railroad tracks, on which the special train traveled.

The identity of Pinkerton’s infiltrated agents was closely held and led to an incident that added to the credibility of his chief operative, Timothy Webster. Webster had become well entrenched among secessionist groups in the Baltimore area, frequently socializing with them and carrying letters through Union lines for them. He played his role so well that another secret service agent, who was not aware of his identity and activities, arrested him in Baltimore. Webster had to contact Pinkerton to obtain his release.

His escape, arranged by Pinkerton, increased Webster’s standing among the Southern sympathizers and allowed him to continue his successful spy

operations. He became a trusted emissary of the Confederate government, delivering letters and other communications to relatives in the North.

These documents were first inspected by Pinkerton’s service before being delivered and in this way served two purposes. Webster not only won the trust of the Confederate authorities, but he also provided the federal government with valuable information. In one case, the intercepted documents revealed the presence of a Confederate spy ring in the Provost Marshal’s office in Washington, D.C.

When General George B. McClellan was given command of the Army of the Potomac in November 1861, Pinkerton came to Washington with him. It was at this time that Pinkerton was given the responsibility for security and counterintelligence within the nation’s capital. How Pinkerton was going to handle this new assignment was spelled out in a letter to McClellan. In it, Pinkerton wrote:

*In operating with my detective force, I shall endeavor to test all suspected persons in various ways. I shall seek access to their houses, clubs, and places of resort, managing that among the members of my force shall be ostensible representatives of every grade of society, from the highest to the most*



***John C. Babcock (center standing) pictured while a member of Pinkerton’s organization. Standing with him are (left) Augustus K. Littlefield and (right) George H. Bangs. Seated (left) William Moore, Secretary to War Secretary Stanton and Allen Pinkerton.***

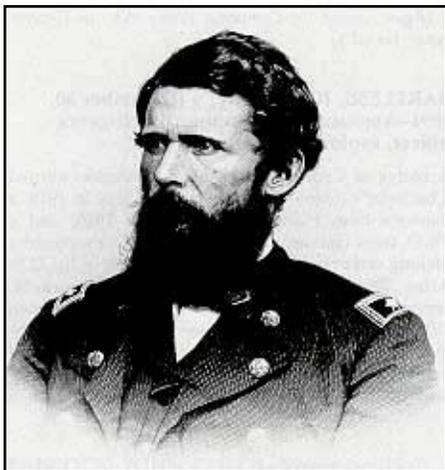
*menial. Some shall have the entree to the gilded salon of the suspected aristocratic traitors, and be their honored guests, while others will act in the capacity of valets, or domestics of various kinds, and try the efficacy of such relations with the household to gain evidence. Other suspected ones will be tracked by the "Shadow" detective, who will follow their every foot-step, and note their every action.*

*I also propose to employ a division of my force for the discovery of any secret traitorous organization which may be in existence; and if any such society is discovered, I will have my operatives become members of the same, with a view to ascertaining the means employed in transmitting messages through the lines, and also for the purpose of learning, if possible, the plans of the rebels. All strangers arriving in the city, whose associations or acts may lay them open to suspicion, will be subjected to a strict surveillance.<sup>12</sup>*

Another counterintelligence technique used by Pinkerton was the double agent. As Pinkerton wrote:

*In war, as in a game of chess, if you know the moves of your adversary in advance, it is then an easy matter to shape your own plans, and make your moves accordingly, and, of course always to your own decided advantage. So in this case, I concluded that if the information intended for the rebels could first be had by us, after that, they were welcome to all the benefit they might derive from them.<sup>13</sup>*

Another of Pinkerton's agents infiltrated the Southern bureau of intelligence in Richmond, managed partly by the Confederate government and



*Lafayette Baker*

partly by wealthy merchants in Richmond and Baltimore. This bureau was said to employ about 50 persons to carry information across Union lines. Pinkerton's agent, George Curtis, gained access to the "subterranean headquarters" of this bureau, which actually were located above ground in a Richmond hotel, by claiming to be a dealer in contraband material. According to Pinkerton, Curtis was such an excellent spy that the "subterranean headquarters, with its corps of operatives, never did the Union cause any practical harm, but a great deal of good, in furnishing intelligence of the movements and intentions of the rebel forces."

Pinkerton's memoirs also recount how his service used women and slaves as spies. Mrs. E. H. Baker, a former resident of Richmond who had moved north at the war's start, was one notable woman agent. Returning to Richmond in Pinkerton's service, she renewed an acquaintance with a Confederate officer and his wife, and learned of a planned test of a submarine battery. She pursued this lead and asked to be invited to the test of a small working model of the Merrimac. She immediately carried news of the test back to Pinkerton who alerted General McClellan and the Secretary of the Navy. Pinkerton saw this incident as changing the destiny of the Union in the face of this "infernal machine."

Pinkerton stopped working with the Union Army after General McClellan was removed as commander, although he continued to investigate government fraud cases. In 1865 he severed his connection with the Secret Service and returned to Chicago to pursue his detective profession. What he provides in his memoir is his case that his wartime agents operated heroically in the service of their country.

### **Lafayette Baker<sup>14</sup>**

Born in New York in 1826 and reared in the Michigan wilderness, Lafayette Baker engaged in mechanical and mercantile pursuits in the state of his birth and in Philadelphia in 1848 before departing, in 1853, for California. Three years later he was an active member of the Vigilance Committee. This experience and his admiration of Francis Vidocq (1775-1857),

an infamous Paris detective whom Baker came to imitate, whetted his appetite for intrigue and the life of the sleuth. When hostilities broke out between the North and the South, Baker happened to be heading for New York City on business. When he became aware of the mischief and misdeeds of Confederate spies and saboteurs in and around Washington, he set out for the capital determined to offer his services as a Union agent.<sup>15</sup>

Arriving in the District of Columbia, Baker obtained an interview with General Winfield Scott, commander of the Army and himself not unfamiliar with spy services. In need of information about the rebel forces at Manassas, Scott, having already lost five previous agents on the mission, solicited Baker's assistance. After an adventure of daring and dash, the intrepid Baker returned three weeks later with the details sought by General Scott. The success of the mission earned Baker a permanent position with the War Department.<sup>16</sup>

The next assignment given Baker involved ferreting out two Baltimore brothers who were running the Union blockade to supply munitions to the Confederates. This he did, breaking up the smuggling operation and earning himself a considerable amount of press publicity.<sup>17</sup>

These activities came to the attention of Secretary Seward who hired Baker at the rate of \$100 a month plus expenses<sup>18</sup> and sent him off to prowl wherever espionage, sabotage, or rebel spy agents were thought to be lurking.<sup>19</sup> Assisted by three hundred Indian cavalrymen, Baker was later ordered to probe the Maryland countryside for the presence of rebel agents and Confederate sympathies.

His mission took him to Chapico, Leonardstown, Port Tobacco, Old Factory, and the farmland of St. George's, St. Charles and St. Mary's counties.<sup>20</sup> As his column advanced, they punished the disloyal. As a result, "he left behind a trail of burning buildings, frightened men, women and children, terrified informers, (and) bullet-pierced Secesh Tobacco planters."<sup>21</sup>

As a consequence of this campaign, Baker attempted to interest Postmaster General Montgomery Blair in a

purge of disloyal Maryland postmasters, replacing them with Union stalwarts or closing the stations. Blair was well aware of disloyalty among some of the Maryland postmasters and earlier had ordered their displacement. In a report to the Secretary of State, Baker claimed he had obtained unlimited authority to conduct the postmaster purge and requested a military force of two hundred to three hundred men to police the localities in Maryland where these disloyal officials had been discovered. The proposal was ignored but Baker had a variety of other tasks to occupy him as Seward's intelligence chief.<sup>22</sup>

With enough endurance for a dozen men, he worked almost without rest to educate himself in the ever-spreading operations of the rebels and their sympathizers. He traveled to Canada to see for himself what the South was doing to build a fire in the rear of the Union: he made the acquaintance of police chiefs of the big northern cities: he personally took prisoners to the harbor forts to look over conditions; he uncovered and jotted down identities of suppliers of war goods to the South; he acquired a firsthand knowledge of Secesh-supporting newspapers, in sedition-ridden New York, New Jersey, and the seething West. Only on rare occasions, when official duty took him there, did he see his wife Jennie, who had gone to the security of her parent's home in Philadelphia.<sup>23</sup>

As a consequence of Lincoln's St. Valentine's Day directive regarding the release of political prisoners and limiting "extraordinary arrests" to "the direction of the military authorities alone," Baker was recommended to the War Department and its new Secretary, Edwin M. Stanton. In accepting Baker's services, Stanton warned him of the grave and desperate situation facing the government, advised him that he would never be permitted to disclose the authority for his actions, and gave notice that he would be expected to pursue all enemies of the Union, regardless of their station, power, loyalty, partisanship, or profession. Baker's detective service was to be the terror of the North as well as the South, secretly funded, and accountable exclusively and directly to the Secretary of War.<sup>24</sup>

The enemies of the state took many forms. An enemy could be a pretty girl with swaying hips

covered by an acre of crinoline, carrier of rebellion-sustaining contraband goods. Or an enemy could be a contractor selling the Union shoddy clothing. Or an enemy could be a Copperhead sapping the strength of the Union by discouraging enlistments. An enemy could also be a Union general with larceny in his soul, gambling away the pay of his soldiers. He could be a guerrilla with a torch firing a government corral within sight of the White House.<sup>25</sup>

For three years, Baker gathered intelligence on the enemies of the Union, reporting his findings to Stanton and Lincoln. In addition, at their direction and sometimes on his own authority, he functioned as an instrument for directly punishing the enemy or for arresting and incarcerating them. Utilizing his intelligence sources, Baker identified and prejudged the despoilers of the Union; relying upon extraordinary military authority and martial law, he seized his foe in his capacity as a Federal policeman; and as the custodian of the Old Capitol Prison and its nefarious annex, the Carroll Prison, he served as jailer of those he captured.



*Mary E. Walker, Winner of the Medal of Honor, who worked for Lafayette Baker.*

Of Baker's Commander-in-Chief, one authority has commented: "No one can ever know just what Lincoln conceived to be limits of his powers."<sup>26</sup>

In his own words, the Sixteenth President wrote:

*" . . . my oath to preserve the Constitution to the best of my ability, imposed upon me the duty of preserving, by every indispensable means, that government—that nation—of which that Constitution was the organic law. Was it possible to lose the nation, and yet preserve the constitution? By general law life and limb must be protected; yet often a limb must be amputated to save a life, but a life is never wisely given to save a limb. I felt that measures, otherwise unconstitutional, might become lawful, by becoming indispensable to the preservation of the constitution through the preservation of the nation. Right or wrong, I assumed this ground, and now avow it. I could not feel that, to the best of my ability, I had ever tried to preserve the constitution, if, to save slavery, or any minor matter, I should permit the wreck of the government, county, and Constitution all together."<sup>27</sup>*

And in the more contemporary view of Clinton Rossiter:

*"Mr. Lincoln subscribed to a theory that in the absence of Congress and in the presence of an emergency the President has the right and duty to adopt measures which would ordinarily be illegal, subject to the necessity of subsequent congressional approval. He did more than this; he seemed to assert that the war powers for the Constitution could upon occasion devolve completely upon the President, if their exercise was based upon public opinion and an inexorable necessity. They were then sufficient to embrace any action within the fields of executive or legislative or even judicial power essential to the preservation of the Union. (He) . . . implied that this government, like all others, possessed an absolute power of self-defense, a power to be exerted by the President of the United States. And this power extended to the breaking of the fundamental laws of the nation, if such a step were unavoidable."<sup>28</sup>*

The presence of this operating viewpoint at the highest level of the Executive Branch, coupled with his own personal ambitions for power and prestige, contributed significantly to Baker's zealous, authoritarian, and often illegal manner of carrying

out his War Department mission. Nevertheless, Baker must be recognized as a professional thoroughly familiar with the methods and tactics of his profession. Reflecting a classically Machiavellian perspective, he once wrote:

*“It may be said that the deception and misstatements resorted to, and inseparable from the detective service, are demoralizing and prove unsoundness of character in its officers. But it must be borne in mind that, in war, no commander fails to deceive the enemy when possible, to secure the best advantage. Spies, scouts, intercepted correspondence, feints in army movements, misrepresentations of military strength and position, are regarded as honorable means of securing victory over the foe. The work of the detectives is simply deception reduced to a science or profession; and whatever objection, on ethical grounds, may lie against the secret service, lies with equal force against the strategy and tactics of Washington, Scott, Grant, and the host of their illustrious associates in the wars of the world. War is a last and terrible resort in the defense of even a righteous cause, and sets at defiance all of the ordinary laws and customs of society, overriding the rights of property and the sanctity of the Sabbath. And not until the nation learns war no more, will the work of deception and waste of morals, men and treasures cease.”*<sup>29</sup>

Establishing offices at 217 Pennsylvania Avenue, in close proximity to both the White House and the War Department, Baker began gathering recruits and organizing his unit. Operating without official status, the group was generally referred to as the Secret Service Bureau. Its personnel, known only to Baker in terms of number and complete identity, bore no credentials other than a small silver badge.<sup>30</sup> Secretly commissioned as a colonel; Baker initially represented himself, when absolutely necessary, as an agent of the War Department. Later, he publicly cited his military rank and held the title of Provost Marshal.

He initiated the nation’s first police dossier system although the rebels, the Copperheads, and the misguided among the Loyalists in the North charged him with poking his private eyes into the homes of the innocent. He gathered systematically the first criminal photo file, enabling a more efficient pursuit of the enemies of the nation. He instituted a policy of seizing suspects in the dead of the night when their

resistance to interrogation and their ability to seek help would be at the lowest ebb. He made a science of the interrogation of prisoners, using teams of detectives to work over a suspect until he was satisfied he either had the full story or he could drag no more information from his victim.

He established a secret fund for building and feeding a vast army of informers and unlisted agents. No one except he knew the full range of his organization. Even his most trusted aides were not allowed to know the identity of all of his operatives.<sup>31</sup>

For reasons of both security and strategy, Baker’s agents were divided into daylight and nighttime units—the men in one group did not know the identity of those in the other—and another section counted operatives who infiltrated and trafficked in the capital’s high society.<sup>32</sup> He cultivated contacts with the police in the nation’s society. He cultivated contacts with the police in the nation’s major cities<sup>33</sup> and kept a close watch on Confederate activities in Canada.<sup>34</sup> By the summer of 1863, a branch office had been set up in New York City<sup>35</sup> and he succeeded in placing his personnel in the Post Office for purposes of inspecting the mails.<sup>36</sup>

On two occasions Baker’s spy service gathered intelligence which probably contributed to the downfall of General McClellan: Baker’s personal penetration of the Confederate forces at Manassas resulted in the discovery that the fortifications and artillery which were supposedly keeping McClellan’s army at bay were actually earthen and wooden fakes and later Lincoln utilized the services of one of Baker’s agents to secretly observe McClellan’s conduct on the battlefield.<sup>37</sup> With the decline of McClellan, Allan Pinkerton, whom Baker regarded as “sagacious,” departed from the scene, leaving some agents and the spy field to Baker.<sup>38</sup> The only other threat to Baker’s supreme command of the secret service operations was the reputed organizer of the old Mexican Spy Company, Ethan Allen Hitchcock, but he was founded to be an old man seized with mysticism and pursuits of alchemy with no desires for any responsibility in the hostilities.<sup>39</sup>

In June of 1863, Baker gained an open commission in the army with the rank of colonel, the opportunity

to wear the Union uniform, and command of a military police force he had sought for some time.<sup>40</sup> The exact size of the unit is not known, or its losses, or its complete record of action. After much pressuring from Baker, Stanton agreed to establish the troop utilizing authority entitling the District Columbia to a battalion of infantry and cavalry for use within its confines.<sup>41</sup> Placed under a direct authority of the Secretary of War, the first Regiment Cavalry, known as “Baker’s Rangers,” consisted, ironically, of recruits from Robert E. Lee’s former command, the Second Dragoons, renamed the Second Regular United States Cavalry at the outbreak of the war.<sup>42</sup>

Hundreds of men sought places in the new regiment; some offered bribes. Whether the attraction was the promise that no soldier in the Baker command would ever be sent outside the immediate vicinity of the District of Columbia or whether Baker’s fame inspired all types of adventurers to flock to his banner was the subject of much conjecture at that time.<sup>43</sup>

In an appeal to the Governor of New York, Baker wrote:

*“ . . . the duties to be performed by this regiment demand on the part of both men and officers qualities of a high order, both mental and physical. Among these, I may enumerate intelligence, sobriety, self-dependence, bodily vigor, the power of endurance, and though last not least, that knowledge of the horse which results from early practical experience and management of that noble animal.”*<sup>44</sup>

The personal qualifications of Baker’s recruits, of course, cannot be assessed. By their actions, however, they demonstrated great military ability, intense loyalty to their commander, and a complete insensitivity to the property, liberties and lives of those they encountered as enemies. For reasons of high morality and public image, the Rangers were unleashed upon the gambling parlors and vice dens of Washington.<sup>45</sup> Soon, however, they began engaging in forays of destruction against enemies of the Union beyond the confines of the capital.<sup>46</sup>

The Rangers were an auxiliary to Baker’s intelligence activities; they were his agents of espionage, enforcement, and protection. Secret operatives gathered information in both the cities and

the countryside of the Potomac region. Baker devoured their reports, conferred with Stanton and/or Lincoln, and then set out with enforcements against the subversives.

In addition to ferreting out spies, blockade runners, and locals giving aid and comfort to the rebels, Baker engaged in three major intelligence enterprises: unmasking crimes in the Treasury Department, smashing the Northwest conspiracy, and capturing the President’s assassin.<sup>47</sup> The opportunity to probe the Treasury Department regarding allegations that it had become a bawdy house and command post for certain predatory interests arose around Christmas, 1863, when Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase invited Baker to investigate the situation.

There was growing talk of scandals in the Treasury Department. Newspapers were saying that the hundreds of girls busy scissoring the new greenbacks were hussies in the night. There were oyster feasts in the bonnet room. Clerks were making off with sheets of uncut currency.

Counterfeiters were discovering it was easier to steal a plate and run off bales of money rather than go to the trouble of making an imitation engraving in some hideaway. The Treasury’s own police seemed helpless to stem the tide of corruption and debauchery. The Blair family, avowed enemies of Chase, was giving support to the rumors. (Postmaster General) Montgomery Blair’s brother, Frank, cried out for congressional inquiry.<sup>48</sup>

The probe was charged and politically explosive. Seward, eyes upon the 1864 election and the White House beyond, might well have wanted Lincoln’s top detective mired in the scandals, defused and defamed along with most of the Administration. In Hanson A. Risley, special Treasury agent, Seward had his own source of intelligence. So close were the two men that Risley gave over one of his daughters to Seward to adoption and, after Mrs. Seward’s death, the old man sought her for his second wife.

In detailing Baker to Treasury, Stanton probably thought he would be the best man to vindicate the President as untainted, honest and ignorant of the conditions there. Himself a frequent critic of Lincoln,

the Secretary of War nevertheless realized that public confidence in the President must be maintained in the midst of the country's perils and he might well have been aware that Lincoln had no direct involvement in the treasury calamities.

Factions within Congress were ready to intervene to attack Lincoln, Chase, and Baker. Ultimately, a committee of investigation was formed, probed the situation, and beclouded the facts and the guilt of those involved.

Baker plunged into the Treasury probe with ferocity and determination. He temporarily relinquished command of the Rangers and established an office in the dark basement of the Treasury building. His techniques were direct and dauntless; he stalked the printing facilities and subjected clerks and lesser officials to ruthless and merciless interrogation. At one juncture he halted a funeral cortege in the midst of the city, seized the corpse of a Treasury girl and had an examination made to determine if her death had resulted from an abortion.<sup>49</sup>

And what did Baker find? At the outset he discovered that young James Cornwell, who had the function of burning mutilated bonds and notes, had pocketed \$2,000 worth of notes. Cornwell was convicted and sent to jail for this offense, the only individual to be prosecuted for crimes against the Treasury in this probe.

Next, Baker alleged that two printers who had sold the Treasury new presses, paper, and a technique for printing currency were conspiring to sell the government worthless machinery and processes. Their presses were weakening the upper floors of the Treasury building and their security procedures were virtually non-existent, allowing ready access to both plates and process. In the midst of the inquiry, the new presses began malfunctioning and greater demands were placed on the building for "improved" printing devices.

Baker discovered that the head of the department of printing and engraving, Spencer Clark, was involved with a number of young women who were cutting and preparing new currency. An associate of Clark's was also implicated and Baker named both

men for dismissal. Eventually it came to pass that it was Secretary Chase who was to resign and the great Treasury scandal passed into history.<sup>50</sup>

In mid-November of 1863, a full month before the Treasury investigation got underway, rumors of a dangerous conspiracy along the Canadian border began circulating. Baker's agents pursued the facts of the matter and by late spring of the following year a fairly clear image of the attack planned by the Confederates was evident. In Richmond, Judal P. Benjamin, Secretary of State for the rebel government, a holder of three cabinet posts in the Confederacy, and a man of imagination, conceived a desperate plan of havoc utilizing secret societies reminiscent of the later Klu Klux Klan guerrillas. Warriors behind Union lines would burn down New York City, free rebel troops imprisoned in the North to loot and pillage throughout the industrial Northeast, and seize Chicago, Buffalo, and Indianapolis. The plan failed to recognize the drift of northern morale; those disenchanted with the war still supported Lincoln, sought the Union as was and the Constitution as is, and otherwise had no interest in or sympathy for a separate Confederate nation.

In the aftermath of the destructive campaigns of Generals Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley and Sherman in Georgia, the rebels were ready for unconventional warfare of their own making.

The Copperhead firebrand Clement Vallandigham was recruited to obtain support for a new nation composed of states adjacent to the Canadian border. Army officers in civilian dress were dispatched north to act as terrorists. The first target for revenge was Chicago. Assembled in Toronto, the band of insurgents made their plans—all of which were carefully recorded by a Baker informer.

Commanders of military prisons were informed of these developments and advised to be prepared for uprisings within or attacks from outside of their institutions. Baker advanced a squadron of agents to Toronto to maintain surveillance of the conspirators who were followed and observed as they straggled into Chicago in the midst of the Democratic National Convention. More than 2,000 civilian-clad Confederate soldiers were scattered around the city.

At the height of the convention proceedings, the area would be put to the torch. While police and firemen fought the flames, an attack would be made on Camp Douglas and its prisoners freed. The banks would be looted, City Hall seized, and the police headquarters occupied. Thus, the second largest city in the land fell to rebel control.

Politics among the conspirators caused a postponement of their assault until Election Day. After reassembling in Toronto, burnings and attacks on local authorities were scheduled for simultaneous occurrence in Chicago, New York, Cincinnati, and Boston. Surveillance of these preparations continued and information from the informer flowed to Baker.

Offensive actions were unleashed against the terrorists. Without warning, General Benjamin F. Butler, seasoned in maintaining the security and serenity of New Orleans, marched into New York with 10,000 Union troops as the clock moved toward Election Day. Confederate arsonists abandoned their grandiose plan of havoc, set a few fires in some hotels (which were quickly distinguished), and fled to Canada. Across the border, they soon learned that they had been fortunate in their escape. A Baker spy in Chicago brought about the ruination of terrorist activities in that city and a Union operative in Indiana gathered enough information to implicate almost the entire band of Confederate conspirators in that state.

While these elements were being rounded up and jailed, Union authorities took an imprisoned Confederate officer into their intelligence corps, swore him to loyalty to the Union cause, and released him to make contact with some of the remaining members of the Northwest Conspiracy. Followed by Baker's agents, the man soon met with a group seeking to liberate 3,000 rebel officers incarcerated on Johnson's Island in Lake Michigan. The intervention of this spy cost the conspirators a cache of arms and the loss of a few men in Chicago and indirectly contributed to the scuttling of the Johnson's Island mission.

By late fall, 1864, the Northwest Conspiracy had collapsed and its principal leaders and organizers had been jailed.<sup>51</sup> The excitement and stimulation of the chase ended. Baker founded himself in an unfamiliar situation. He was given no public credit for his part

in smashing the great conspiracy. On the contrary, his enemies increased their efforts to build up the ugly image of the Bastille master, and he continued to be identified in the public mind with unjust arrests and imprisonment, invasions of the rights of private persons and rumored profiteering. Baker still knew that, as a secret agent, the details of his activities must remain secret.

If, however he had hoped that this sensational case would change the attitude toward him in Congress and Administration circles, or would convince the Copperheads that he put the Union before personal gain, he must have been sadly disappointed. His success in securing and transmitting information which led to the dramatic collapse of the great conspiracy and the punishment of its leaders in the North still brought him no evidence that his services were to be fairly judged by the results he achieved for the Union cause.<sup>52</sup>

Baker had just completed a successful investigation of fraud and deception surrounding the draft, bounty-hunting, defrauding sailors out of prize money, and efforts at morally corrupting Union troops in the New York City area when he received the news of Lincoln's assassination. Undoubtedly he felt guilt for not having had more advance information about the conspiracy against the President and for not having had agents near the Chief Executive when the murderer struck. Upon receiving word that Lincoln had been shot and was dead, Baker threw himself into the pursuit and capture of those responsible for the crime. After producing a handbill, the first to be circulated for a nationally wanted criminal, describing John Wilkes Booth in detail, Baker set about interrogating everyone and anyone who knew anything about the conspirators involved in the assassination.<sup>53</sup>

Stanton went along with the detective's thinking and supported his tigerish moves to stalk his prey. One by one, Booth's accomplices were rounded up. Baker's rival police agencies did most of the work. But he took charge of the prisoners, dragged incriminating admissions from them, put black hoods on their heads, and stuffed them in the hold of a monitor in the river.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, Baker found Booth's track, pursued him with a command of cavalry, and came at least to the

Garrett farm where the assassin had taken refuge in a barn. His prey cornered, Baker confronted the killer, demanded his surrender or the alternative of firing the barn. In the midst of negotiations and flames, Booth was shot by either himself or by Sergeant Boston Corbett. Baker took charge of the body and later sought a portion of the rewards for capturing Booth. The amount subsequently awarded Baker was reduced to \$3,750 from a potential of \$17,500: the secret service chief continued to be unpopular with the Congress.<sup>55</sup>

With the death of Lincoln, Baker became the protector of the new President, Andrew Johnson, and set up the first White House secret service details in the history of the Republic.<sup>56</sup> With the peace of Appomattox, however, the career of the spy chief began to rapidly decline. The rebel foe of wartime now walked the streets of the capital. Many of the prostitutes and gamblers Baker had jailed under military law were again free. These, together with political enemies, taunted and reproached the once powerful secret service, a vestige of war, which seemed to have no future mission.

Nevertheless, Baker attempted to carry on in the old style. His task was to protect the President: his immediate foe, he surmised, were various female pardon brokers, lately sympathetic to the South, who prevailed upon the President to grant clemency and forgiveness to all manner of rebels. In attempting to halt this traffic in and out of the White House, Baker incurred the wrath of President Johnson and a lawsuit that successfully damaged his status and role. In the midst of the trial, he was routinely mustered out of the army and effectively left without a friend or defender.<sup>57</sup> He departed Washington in disgrace, returned to his wife in Philadelphia, wrote his memoirs in lieu of finding other work, contracted spinal meningitis and died on the evening of July 3, 1868.

Lafayette Baker was a zealot who, imbued with a strong sense of righteousness and a taste of vigilantism, in the name of a cause became oblivious to the ends-means relationship underlying his function. In his defense of the Union and democratic government, he resorted to extreme actions obnoxious to popular rule and, in some instances, in violation of constitutional guarantees. He actively sought to exceed his intelligence role and became policeman, judge, and jailer. His desires

in this regard, and his capacity for achievement of same, were fostered and fed by the exigencies of the moment and the liberties Lincoln took in administering (or not administering) the law.

When Lincoln died and the war ended, Baker became a political pariah with a vestigial function. His activities had annoyed many, frightened some, and made bitter enemies of an important and powerful few. With the onset of peace in the Nation, he was virtually stripped of his organization and official status and left vulnerable to legal, political, and financial reprisals. These forces converged, coalesced, and crushed. Due to the secret nature of Baker's operations and his tendency to embellish fact, the full account of the activities of this spy chief may never be known. In all likelihood, his record of service will always be controversial, and of debatable value.

### Henry Beebee Carrington<sup>58</sup>

Henry Beebee Carrington conducted intelligence operations against political enemies—the Copperheads and rebel conspirators attempting to undermine the Union cause. Born in Connecticut in 1824, Carrington became an ardent abolitionist in his youth, graduated from Yale in 1845, and taught for a while in the Irving Institute at Tarrytown, New York. Under the influence of the school's founder, Washington Irving, he subsequently wrote *Battles of the American Revolution*, which appeared in 1876. He was also to write seven other major titles. Leaving New York, he taught at the New Haven Collegiate Institute while pursuing a law degree at his old alma mater.

In 1848 he moved to Ohio and entered upon a law practice. Over the next dozen years Carrington represented a variety of commercial, manufacturing, banking, and railroad interests and became a pioneer in Republican politics. A close friend and supporter of Governor Salmon P. Chase, he was subsequently appointed to a position to reorganize the state militia (1857). He subsequently became an adjutant general for Ohio, mustering nine regiments of militia at the outbreak of the Civil War. He then was commissioned a colonel of the 18th United States Infantry and took command of an army camp near Columbus.

In neighboring Indiana, Governor Olive P. Morton had need of Carrington's services. For reasons not altogether clear—perhaps it was his partisan political past and /or his ardent abolitionism—Carrington was ordered, upon the request of Morton, to organize the state's levies for service.

When Carrington arrived in Indiana, political warfare between the adherents of the administration and its opponents was beginning in earnest. The favorite weapon of the Republicans was that ephemeral and elusive order, the Knights of the Golden Circle. Carrington joined in wholeheartedly. On December 22, 1862, he blamed the appalling rate of desertion on the treasonable secret societies, whose penetration of the army was shown by knowledge among soldiers of a "battle sign" which would save them from rebel bullets.

In a long report dated March 19, 1863, he described the situation as so alarming that it bordered on open revolt. He claimed that the Knights had ninety-two thousand members between sixteen and seventy who were drilling constantly. They were plotting to seize the arsenals, the railroads, and the telegraph in order to revolutionize Indiana and "assert independent authority as a state." They communicated with Confederates, in particular with General Morgan, whose picture hung in many homes and whose name was "daily praised." Thousands of them believed the



*Henry Beebee Carrington*

bold raider would shortly appear to "raise the standard of revolt in Indiana." If he did, Carrington was sure Morgan could raise "an army of 20,000 traitors."<sup>59</sup>

What prompted these comments by Carrington and where he get his information? The answer to these questions appears to derive from the activities of Governor Morton. Taking advantage of the crisis conditions that the war created, Morton had established himself as virtual dictator of the state. He dealt harshly with rebel sympathizers, Copperheads, Democrats, and anyone opposed to his rule. By the end of 1861, a spy system had been inaugurated to keep watch of these enemies.<sup>60</sup> Carrington was given charge of this intelligence organization and thus became familiar with the "foes of the Union" which it kept under surveillance. There is strong evidence that Carrington had no desire for combat service and twice Morton intervened to prevent his transfer to the front lines. Thus, it was important that Carrington cast himself in the role of an intelligence chief devoted to maintaining the security of the state, even though disaster appeared to be just around the corner.

In March 1863, Carrington was promoted to brigadier-general and made commander of the District of Indiana of the Department of the Ohio, later renamed the Northern Department. By this time, however, he had intelligence activities organized and operating under his direction. His secret service:

*"... was composed of spies, informers, betrayers, and outside secret agents. Inside officials who were jealous of more important leaders were worked on; the itch for money played a part; in quite a few instances, unsuspecting loyal men who had joined the casts were amazed at the lengths to which love of constitutional rights or Southern sympathies could carry the assertion of dissent. From many sources, and for almost as many motives, disclosures flowed in to Carrington's headquarters."<sup>61</sup>*

Claiming to have between two and three thousand men reporting to him, Carrington enlisted the services of almost anyone who would provide information about an "enemy." Unsolicited reports were gratefully accepted as well. The amateur sleuths and informers were supplemented with a few choice agents and detectives. Spies apparently were paid from state

funds at the rate of \$100 per month, over six times the amount received by a Federal soldier.<sup>62</sup>

Early in 1863 Carrington claimed to have emissaries at the meetings of the secret societies. In April 1864, he asked Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas for money to organize a twelve-man detective force. One of his agents said he had eighteen men at such work early in 1864.

General Alvin P. Hovey, who succeeded Carrington August 25, 1864, continued his espionage organization. Colonel Conrad Baker, the state provost marshal, also employed informers who reported directly to him. At least one of the district provost marshals, Colonel Thompson, had an agent who worked for him among Democrats of the Seventh District. He signed his reports only as "H.," and his identity was not even known to Colonel Baker, Thompson's supervisor.

Carrington claimed he participated personally in his work, once attending "in disguise" a meeting of the Sons of Liberty in Indianapolis. Be that as it may, the general was probably not exaggerating when he claimed to know every morning what had happened in the lodges the night before. Not only did he have his own spies, but also he kept in close touch with other officials who conducted espionage.<sup>63</sup>

While Carrington's operatives were effective in breaking up the Sons of Liberty, the Knights of the Golden Circle, and elements of the Northwest Conspiracy, they also contributed to arbitrary arrests, infringements upon the freedom of speech and freedom of association, and otherwise maintained a corrupt and despotic regime. The manner in which the intelligence organization was recruited—utilizing betrayers, jealous and disgruntled officials, informers, and invalidated hearsay from unsolicited sources—caused it to traffic in unreliable information of generally more political than military value. And the suspicion prevails that the whole arrangement served to maintain Governor Morton's administration and coincidentally counteracted Confederate operatives who happened to count among his foes.

General Alvin P. Hovey replaced Carrington in August 1864. With less than a year of warfare ahead of him, Hovey assumed control of the espionage

organization as the new commander of the Indian District. It is not immediately evident if he made any changes in the intelligence operation other than to gain access to the funds seized from bounty jumpers to pay his agents.<sup>64</sup> If the spy system did not collapse at the end of the war, it must certainly have been discarded in 1867, when Governor Morton resigned to enter the United States Senate.

Carrington was first mustered out of service as a brigadier-general of volunteers, rejoined his old regiment in the Army of the Cumberland, completed war duty and saw Indian campaigns in the West. He built and commanded Fort Phil Kearny but lost the respect of his fellow officers due to his reputation as a "political warrior" and his demonstrated lack of aggressiveness in several Indian skirmishes. Before a decision to remove him from command could be implemented, Carrington became further embroiled in controversy.

In December 1866, a force of fifteen hundred to three thousand Indians massacred a force of eighty officers and men under Captain William J. Fetterman. The disaster was attributed to Fetterman's disobedience of Carrington's order to proceed on a certain route of march: instead, he had directly engaged the war party from their rear while they were attacking a group of woodcutters.

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### Stanton's Letter

The Secretary of War  
*Washington City, D.C.*  
*May 2, 1863—11 a.m.*

Major-General Hooker,

We cannot control intelligence in relationship to your movements while your generals write letters giving details. A letter from General VanAllen to a person not connected with the War Department describes your position as entrenched near Chancellorsville.

Can't you give his sword something to do, so that he will have less time for a pen?

/s/ Edwin M. Stanton

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The Indians turned on Fetterman's force and annihilated them. Because no one had heard Carrington's orders to Fetterman, coupled with existing distrust of the colonel's leadership, rumors persisted that the men had been ordered into tragedy. General Grant moved to court-martial Carrington but, at the suggestion of General William T. Sherman, submitted the matter to a court of inquiry, which subsequently exonerated Carrington. Nevertheless, Carrington was relieved of command and, with his military career ruined; he resigned and spent the rest of his life attempting to convince the public of his innocence in the incident. He also wrote a number of books and taught military science at Wabash College in Indiana before his death in 1912.

## Spies

### Belle Boyd

Belle Boyd is probably the Civil War's most famous spy; but, in the view of a present-day student of her career, she is also the War's most overrated spy.

A Shenandoah Valley girl, Belle Boyd was only 17 years old in 1861. However, she was persevering in her efforts to aid the South by procuring useful information on Northern activities, much of it for the use of General "Stonewall" Jackson. To support her claims to success in secret service, Miss Boyd held



*Belle Boyd*

an honorary Confederate Army rank, as well as the firm opinion as to her abilities of the entire North (especially that of its counterintelligence officers). The extent to which her efforts actually aided Southern arms is, however, uncertain and will probably remain so. One can admit that she was a woman of great spirit and charm.

On several occasions, the Union forces captured Belle Boyd, and each time she was released from imprisonment. However, Miss Boyd's activities became increasingly a matter of public knowledge, thus reducing her effectiveness.

Early in 1864, her health somewhat undermined, Miss Boyd decided to go to England. Jefferson Davis concurred in this decision, as she could be used as a courier to carry dispatches on her trip. On the day after her ship sailed from Wilmington, North Carolina, it was captured by a Northern warship and escorted to Boston.

Ensign Harding was placed in charge of the prize, and, on the trip north, he became completely mesmerized by Belle Boyd, finally proposing marriage, an offer that she accepted. Arriving in Boston, Miss Boyd was shortly exiled to Canada, from whence she went to England.

Through carelessness, Ensign Harding permitted the captain of the blockade-runner to escape in Boston, and Harding was cashiered from the Navy. He too made his way to England, where he and Belle Boyd were married. While in England in 1865, Belle Boyd published her memoirs, which is considered to be essentially sound with the usual embellishments of color and detail.

### Spencer Kellogg Brown

After brief service in the Union Army, Spencer Brown enlisted as a sailor on a Federal gunboat on the Mississippi River. With the permission of his commander, he "deserted" in January 1862, to begin an espionage mission within the Confederate lines. Brown succeeded in making his way back to General Ulysses S. Grant's headquarters during the battle of Shiloh with useful information on the Confederate order of battle.

In August 1862, Brown was captured while on a naval mission to blow up a Confederate vessel. He was charged with being a Union spy and a deserter from the Confederate Army. The charge of desertion was based on his alleged “service” with Confederate troops while accompanying them on his espionage mission before the battle of Shiloh earlier in 1862. He was executed in the fall of 1863.

While Spencer Brown is only a minor figure as a spy, he is remembered in part because the Confederacy executed him as a spy in defiance of a rule of military law adhered to by the Union forces. This rule was that when a person, who was formerly a spy, was subsequently taken prisoner while not engaged in espionage, he would not be tried as a spy.

### **Rose O’Neil Greenhow**

Rose O’Neil Greenhow was the widow of the celebrated Dr. Robert Greenhow, who was librarian and chief translator of the Department of State from 1831-1850. Because of her husband’s status, she was one of the chief figures in Washington society during that period. A native of Port Tobacco, Maryland, in 1861, she identified herself with the cause of the South in the Civil War and became the first of the Confederate secret agents in the nation’s capital.

She was arrested on 21 August 1861 by Allan Pinkerton, chief of the Secret Service on the staff of General McClellan, at the instigation of President Abraham Lincoln. She was first imprisoned in her own home at 16th and H Streets, NW (where the



*Rose O’Neil Greenhow*

Hay-Adams Hotel now stands) and then for five months in the Capital Prison, which stood where the Supreme Court building now sits. Her little daughter and namesake, Rose, then age eight, shared her imprisonment with her.

Historians and writers have overestimated the value of Greenhow’s spying for the South. Except for confirming that General Irvin McDowell’s was moving his troops to Manassas, which gave General P. G. Beauregard the time he needed to prepare for battle, Greenhow’s espionage activities were of little value to the Southern cause. Much of her information was obtained by having people walk around Washington, D.C. and report to her what they saw. She did have one “knowledgeable” source, Senator Henry Wilson, who chaired the Senate’s Military Affairs Committee. He was reportedly her lover but it is doubtful that he provided any important military or political information to her.

She, like many spies, also failed to destroy incriminating evidence she kept in her house. After her arrest, a search of her home by Pinkerton’s men, discovered copies of her intelligence reports. Although Greenhow used a code to write portions of her reports, she also left a copy of one of the plain-text messages, which allowed Pinkerton to decipher her messages.

After her arrest she continued to send messages to her Confederate handler, Thomas Jordan, who was General Beauregard’s adjutant.

Historians cite this fact to prove Greenhow’s resourcefulness but any counterintelligence analysis shows just the opposite. Pinkerton was no fool. He kept an airtight watch on Greenhow, allowing only a few visitors to see her, and punishing any of the guards who failed to inspect anything leaving the house. In fact, the Confederates no longer trusted any information she sent to them.

She was released on 1 June 1862 and taken through the Union lines to Richmond, Virginia, where she resided for a short time. While in Richmond, she wrote a book, *My Imprisonment and the First Year of Abolition Rule in Washington*. In autumn 1862 she boarded a ship, which ran the Union blockade at Wilmington, North Carolina and landed in England

via Nassau. In London she had her book published. She also represented the Confederacy in diplomatic negotiations with England and France.

She decided to return to the United States and, in the fall of 1864, she boarded a ship that attempted to run the blockade at Wilmington. The ship ran aground in high seas at Cape Fear River. Greenhow was determined to go ashore and persuaded the captain to lower a small boat. The small boat capsized and all aboard was saved but Greenhow who drown.

### **C. Lorain Ruggles**

C. Lorain Ruggles was a member of the 20th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, serving in the Mississippi-Tennessee Theater as a scout, spy and detective. He claimed to be the brother of a Confederate general, in whose command he sometimes operated. Ruggles expressed his philosophy as follows: "People often ask me, 'What is the essential qualification of a good spy?' My answer is, 'It requires an accomplished liar.' I mean by that a man that can successfully practice deception. I do not mean that a man must be a habitual liar. There is nothing that I despise more than a man whose word cannot be relied upon. Whether deception, as I have practiced it in the discharge of my duty as a spy, is a moral wrong, I shall not attempt here to argue. Of this much I am sure: it has many times saved my life, and perhaps the lives of thousands of others, besides saving immense sums of money to the Government."

One of Ruggles' superiors, Brigadier General Wiles, stated that "I never knew him to give false information," and Ruggles' book contains several official comments on his success. Ruggles' book is titled, *Four Years a Scout and Spy*. It was ghost written for him by one of his officers, Major Edward C. Downs, who enlisted Ruggles in 1861. The book went through several editions, and in a later edition, Ruggles listed himself as the author and eliminated Major Downs' introduction. The title was also changed to *Perils of Scout-Life*.

### **Henry Bascom Smith**

Lieutenant Henry Smith (whose self-assumed post-war rank was that of major) was occupied for much of the Civil War in basic counterintelligence work, including detection of blockade-runners and

supervision of Confederate prisoners. Smith operated in Baltimore, Maryland, a center of secret service activity for both the Union and the Confederacy.

He joined the Union army as a second lieutenant in a New York heavy artillery regiment in January 1862. The following May his unit was ordered to Baltimore. After several adventures as a prisoner escort, Smith was appointed Assistant Provost Marshal at Fort McHenry, where he had his first experience in counterintelligence activities. He wrote: "Confederate mail carrying, spy promoting, blockade promoting, recruiting for Confederate service, were being engineered right from among these prisoners. I under-grounded it all. Through this channel, I enlisted for the Confederate service ... to discover their actions ...."

Smith did not "under-ground" by any means all such activity at Baltimore, but even so his claim is more modest, and more convincingly presented, than those others who overemphasized or glorified their intelligence and counterintelligence worth. His secret service rationale also was less overstated than most others.

### **Felix Grundy Stidger**

Felix Stidger, after serving part of the war in a Kentucky (Federal) regiment, took his discharge and went to work as a detective. Despite his Union background, he was accepted as a member of the Copperhead secret societies in Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio. He was so successful in his penetration that he rose to a high office in the society His penetration was very instrumental in the arrest and prosecution of the chief conspirators.

Although he had testified in public, Stidger waited nearly 40 years to publish his story. While his story is not entirely verifiable, it is among the most trustworthy of the Civil War secret service memoirs. In producing such an account, Stidger unwittingly lent credence to his belief that the Copperheads trusted him because his manner had a certain straightforwardness about it. He wrote: "I know of no other reason why I should have been able to look them so steadily in their eyes except an innate consciousness of my being in the performance of a just and honorable duty to my government."

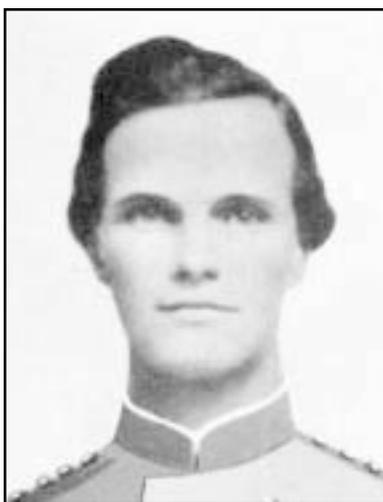
### **Benjamin Franklin Stringfellow**

Following the First Battle of Bull Run, Frank Stringfellow was trained as a scout under the command of Colonel J.E.B. Stuart. He became one of Stuart's better scouts and spies, and is one of the few Confederate intelligence operatives whose service can be even slightly documented. He is said to have spent weeks in occupied Alexandria collecting information; was in the environs of most of the great battles fought by the Army of Northern Virginia; was captured once and exchanged.

Of Captain Stringfellow's service, Colonel Stuart wrote, "In determining the enemy's real design, I rely upon you, as well as the quick transmission of the information. . . . Your service is too important and may be worth all the Yankee trains." Lauded by Confederate President Jefferson Davis, *Stringfellow* summed up: "My business was to get information."

### **Elizabeth Van Lew**

Her parents were Northerners who had moved to Richmond, Virginia, where they became prominent citizens and where Elizabeth was born. Her father John Van Lew died when she was a young girl, leaving her and her mother to carry on. They stayed in Richmond but did not hold with southern thinking. They freed their family slaves and used their money to purchase relatives of their slaves in order to set them free also. Elizabeth was considered an eccentric by Richmond society.



*Benjamin Franklin Stringfellow*

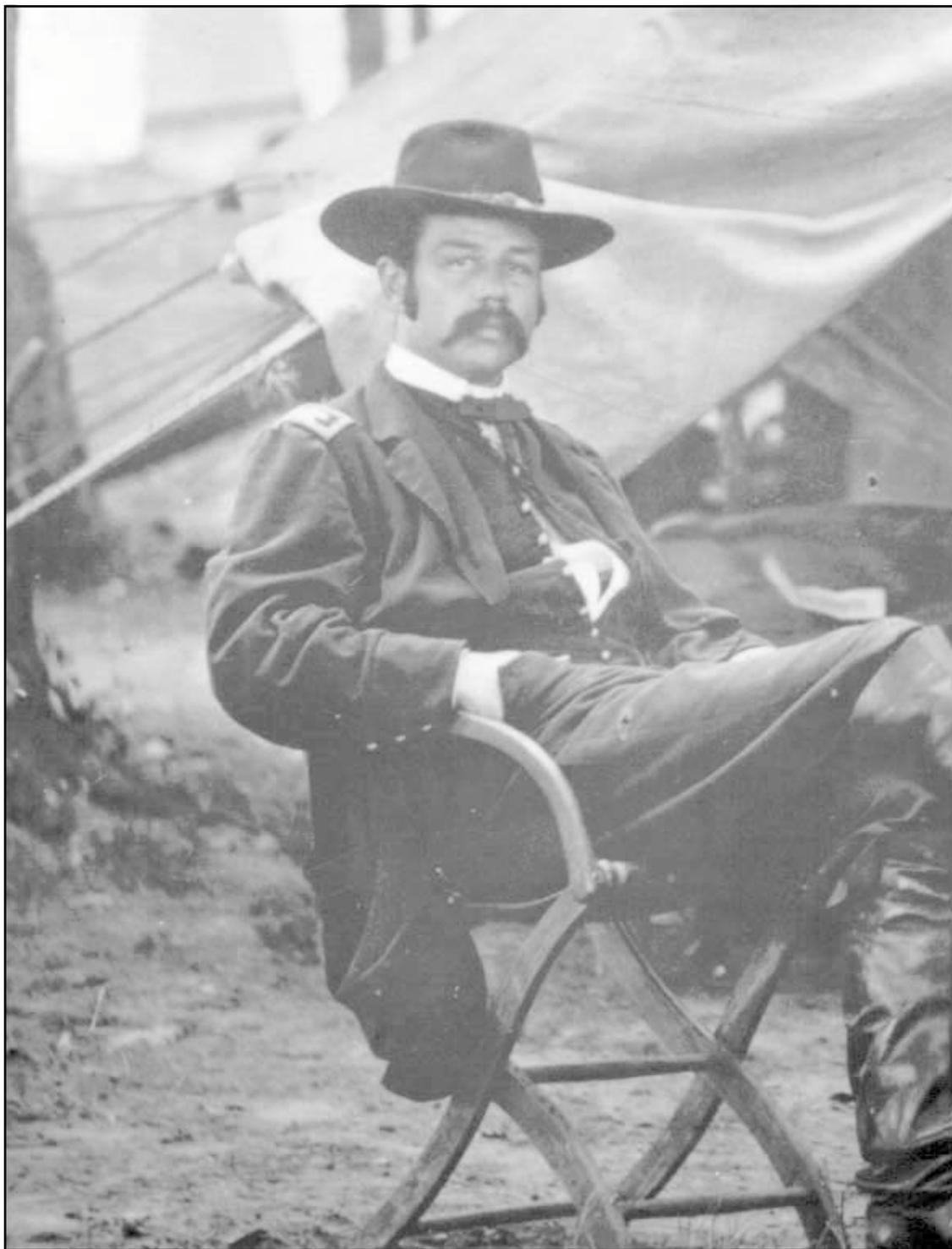
When the Civil War came, Elizabeth became the center of a northern spy network, called the Richmond Ring. She established five safehouses from which messages could be relayed to Union lines. The information came from a variety of sources. She succeeded in planting one of her former slaves within the Confederate White House of Jefferson Davis. She coordinated the underground activities of her brother, John Newton Van Lew and a black marketeer, Frederick Lohmann.

She secured the services of Samuel Ruth, the superintendent of the vital Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad. Ruth was effective in making the railroad inefficient, causing delays in moving valuable Confederate troops and supplies, without raising suspicion.

The Confederates arrested Ruth for aiding southerners, who no longer wanted to live in the Confederacy, to defect to the north. She was tried but the charges were dismissed for lack of evidence.

Elizabeth came under Confederate counter-intelligence scrutiny because she and her mother visited and provided food and clothing to Union Army officers held in Richmond's notorious Libby prison. Union operatives tasked Elizabeth to obtain from the prisoners the latest information on battle information and estimates of Confederate army strength. Even when prison authorities refused to allow her to speak with the prisoners, she was able through other means to secure the information. Confederate counter-intelligence made every effort to catch her. They kept her house under constant surveillance and conducted unannounced and random searches of her home. In the end, they failed to find any incriminating evidence against her.

When the Confederate Government abandoned Richmond, Elizabeth raised the American flag and welcomed General Ulysses Grant into her home upon his arrival in the city. After the war, she put in a claim to be reimbursed for her expenses. She was supported in her effort by then President Grant, but Congress rejected the claim. She might have died penniless but the Union officers she comforted in Libby prison raised enough funds to provide her with a steady income for the rest of her life.



*Col. George H. Sharpe following the Battle of Gettysburg, 1863*

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IMPORTANT DATES AND COUNTERINTELLIGENCE EVENTS

THE CIVIL WAR,  
1859-1865

1859	25 October	John Brown indicted and convicted of treason for leading a raid on Harpers Ferry.
	2 December	John Brown is hanged for treason.
1860	20 December	South Carolina seceded from the Union.
1861	22 February	President-elect Abraham Lincoln warned by Allan Pinkerton of an assassination plot against him.
	2 April	Allan Pinkerton offered the services of his detective agency to President Lincoln, who does not respond.
	12 April	Fort Sumter is attacked and surrenders two days later.
	1 November	George McClellan becomes general-in-chief of the Union forces.
	1 November	Allan Pinkerton given responsibility for security and counterintelligence within the nation's capital.
	20 December	Radical Republicans in Congress set-up a Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War to investigate Lincoln's assumption of vast powers.
1862	15 January	Edwin Stanton becomes Secretary of War.
	14 February	Executive Order No. 1 issued by President Lincoln which provided for wholesale release of most political prisoners.
	23 May	Rebel Spy, Belle Boyd, arrested for spying.
	August	Spencer Kellogg Brown, a Union spy, arrested and in the fall of 1863 was executed.
	23 August	Rose Greenhow, a Confederate spy, arrested in Washington, D.C.
	22 September	Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation.
	7 November	General Ambrose E. Burnside replaces McClellan.
1863	3 March	The Signal Corps is created.
	30 March	Col. George Sharpe appointed first professional intelligence officer and established the Bureau of Military Information for the Union Army of the Potomac.
1865	9 April	The Civil War ends.
	14 April	President Lincoln is assassinated.
	5 July	William F. Wood becomes the first chief of the U.S. Secret Service.