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*“Black Flag Warfare”:
Lincoln and the Raids Against
Richmond and Jefferson Davis*

A RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOK presents a strong case in support of the charge implicating Jefferson Davis and other Confederate leaders in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.¹ At least two historians are now convinced that the study of the Lincoln assassination will never again be the same. What has become clear is that scholars will have to reassess the possible connection between Confederate leaders and John Wilkes Booth's deed.² If the Confederates were involved in the assassination of President Lincoln, it is probable that their complicity occurred as a reaction to the actions of the northern president. In his book treating the Lincoln murder conspiracies, William Hanchett noted the apparent intent of Colonel Ulric Dahlgren to murder Jefferson Davis in 1864. The incident led George G. Meade, Commander of the Army of the Potomac, to suspect that Dahlgren and his immediate superior were involved in a plot to kill Davis.³ With the implication of Meade and Dahlgren in the plot, the

¹ William A. Tidwell, James O. Hall, and David Winfred Gaddy, *Come Retribution: The Confederate Secret Service and the Assassination of Lincoln* (Jackson, 1988).

² See the reviews by William Hanchett in *Civil War Times-Illustrated* 27 (Oct. 1988), 33, 45; and James M. McPherson in *Civil War History* 35 (1989), 176-78. For an unfavorable opinion, see the review by Thomas R. Turner in *Lincoln Herald* 91 (1989), 128-29.

³ William Hanchett, *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies* (Urbana, 1983), 33-34. Hanchett's concerns were with plots against Lincoln, and he therefore did not pursue the Dahlgren matter beyond Meade's reaction.

city of Philadelphia is connected to the story of the Federal raids on Richmond, for both Meade and Dahlgren were Philadelphians. Along with General Isaac J. Wistar and another significant participant, General Hugh J. Kilpatrick, a native of New Jersey, Meade and Dahlgren are linked to activities that point to Lincoln's involvement in plans for raids against Richmond. These raids involved the kidnapping and/or murder of Jefferson Davis. This paper will attempt, to a large extent, to investigate Lincoln's role in the planning of two raids against the Confederate capital.

In May 1863, as part of his plan to defeat Robert E. Lee at the Battle of Chancellorsville, Joseph Hooker sent General George Stoneman and a large cavalry contingent behind the enemy to disrupt Lee's supply lines and communications and to create as much havoc as possible. Although the raid resulted in little military damage, it had some psychological value. In less than five days the raiders had moved around the entire Confederate army and penetrated the Richmond defenses. Some units, under Colonel Hugh J. Kilpatrick's command, got as close as two miles from the Confederate capital. A few days after the Stoneman raid, two Union generals arrived in Baltimore as parolees from Richmond prisoner-of-war camps. It seems that they told anybody who would listen to them that Richmond had been undefended during the fighting at Chancellorsville. One of the paroled officers explained to some newspapermen that "nothing would have prevented Stoneman from riding through Richmond and burning it down." The Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin* editorialized that Stoneman's forces might have captured Richmond, "bagged the whole administration, and set the Union prisoners free."⁴

The second paroled general, August Willich, met with Lincoln on May 8, 1863. As Lincoln explained to General Hooker, Willich was in Richmond when Stoneman's forces appeared before the city. At the time, according to Willich, "there was not a sound pair [of] legs in Richmond." The Union cavalry, concluded the president, "could have

⁴ Frank Moore, ed., *Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, etc.*, . . . (12 vols., New York, 1861-1869), 6:72 (diary), and 6:603-4 (documents); Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*, May 8, 1863, p. 2; May 9, 1863, p. 4.

completely gone in and burnt every thing & brought us Jeff Davis."⁵ This notion that a sudden cavalry attack could penetrate the Richmond defenses, burn down the city, and rescue the prisoners of war there continued to interest Lincoln for at least a year.

Freeing the Union prisoners incarcerated in Richmond became an emotional issue in the North. By the beginning of November 1863, an estimated 13,000 Union soldiers were confined in Richmond prisoner-of-war camps.⁶ Increasingly, during that month, the arrival in the North of exchanged prisoners, as well as escapees, resulted in press reports of cruel suffering in the Richmond camps. One Washington newspaper noted, upon the arrival at Annapolis of a large number of freed Union prisoners, that "most of them" were "in almost a dying condition." Eight others had lost their lives during the passage to Annapolis from City Point. A few days later, the paper reported that thirty-five more had died in Annapolis. Physicians who examined sixteen of the dead found that "in each case death was caused by starvation and exposure."⁷ Press reports in other cities offered similar details. A New York newspaper mentioned that at Libby Prison in Richmond inmates went without blankets and that some had been "literally starved to death." According to a Philadelphia paper, prisoners on Belle Isle, also in Richmond, had an insufficient number of tents, and thus "thousands were without any protection" from the elements. Deaths in the prison hospital averaged forty-three daily. Little could be done for these patients as "no medicines or suitable nourishment" were available.⁸

Private accounts reaching President Lincoln confirmed the stories in the press. General Neal Dow, the noted prohibitionist, managed to smuggle out of prison a note to the president. In it, he wrote of

⁵ Abraham Lincoln to Joseph Hooker, May 8, 1863, in Roy P. Basler et al., eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (9 vols., New Brunswick, 1953-1955), 6:202-3 (hereafter, Lincoln, *Collected Works*). I am grateful to William Hanchett who brought this letter to my attention.

⁶ William B. Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisoners: A Study in War Psychology* (Columbus, 1930), 118.

⁷ *Washington Evening Star*, Nov. 4, 1863, p. 2.

⁸ *New York Herald*, Nov. 8, 1863, p. 5; Nov. 9, 1863, p. 6; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 19, 1863, p. 1. These two papers published several additional accounts in November describing the horrible conditions in the Richmond camps.

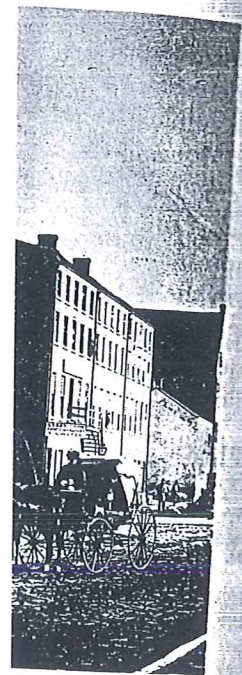


Libby Prison, Richmond, 1862. Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society.

deplorable conditions—poor food and a lack of blankets. Dow concluded his letter with the opinion that no penitentiary existed “in this or any other country that I have seen where every arrangement is not far superior to anything here.”⁹ Two months later, in another letter to Lincoln, Dow explained that the diet of the prisoners on Belle Isle had been limited to “vile corn bread” and a “ $\frac{1}{2}$ gill of rice” per day, with “no prospect in the future of meat or of any improvement.” Dow added that Confederate authorities had admitted to him that they lacked the power to improve conditions in the camps.¹⁰ These reports reaching the North of suffering in the Richmond prison camps added

⁹ Neal Dow to Lincoln, Nov. 12, 1863, Abraham Lincoln Papers (microfilm) (Library of Congress).

¹⁰ Dow to Lincoln, Jan. 20, 1864, *ibid.* For War Department reaction to the sufferings of the prisoners, see Henry W. Halleck to E.M. Stanton, Nov. 15, 1863, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (128 vols., Washington, 1880-1901), Series II, 6:523-24 (hereafter, *O.R.*).

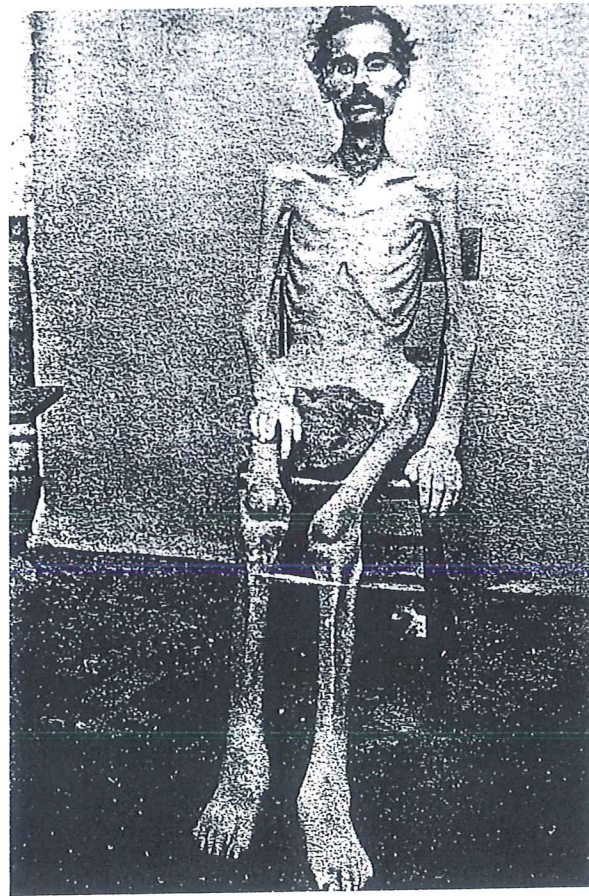


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A Union prisoner at Belle Isle, photographed in 1864. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Commandery Military Order of the Loyal Legion and the U.S. Army Military History Institute.

impetus to the wish to destroy the Confederate capital and capture Davis. Some evidence supports the belief that Lincoln may have played a direct role in the attempts to free the prisoners and capture or assassinate the Confederate president.

Soon, potential uprisings reached the news. The first attempt to free the prisoners was most likely scheduled for early November 1863. Details are not clear, for only scattered Confederate sources are available. J.B. Jones, the Confederate War Department diarist, noted that some prisoners on Belle Isle had been overheard by their captors discussing a possible uprising. He added that "a full division of the

enemy [had] been sent to Newport News, probably to co-operate with the prisoners."¹¹ Later in November, the Richmond press offered more details concerning this seeming aborted uprising. In an article, entitled "A Big Plot Discovered," the *Richmond Examiner* reported on the "Yankee" scheme "to release the prisoners" and engage in an "indiscriminate slaughter of guards and populace." According to "intercepted correspondence," all the prisoners in the Richmond area were to rise up, overpower their "few sentinels," take possession of "all the arms within their reach," and move "double-quick" in the direction of Williamsburg and Yorktown. On the way, they were to meet a large Federal cavalry force, in on the plot, that would be simultaneously making a "rapid raid" on Richmond. The combined Union forces would then retreat to safety with Richmond and prisons "ablaze at their backs." Once alerted to this danger, Confederate authorities doubled the guard around the prisons and planted additional cannon overlooking Belle Isle. "The fullest preparations" were made to "blow the Yankees out of existence" upon the first sign of revolt. As a result of this Confederate show of force, "the plot withered."¹²

In its next issue, the *Examiner* printed additional details. The plot was first made known to Confederate authorities by a prisoner. A prompt investigation ensued and disclosed that the plan to break out of prison was real, and that its "timely discovery alone prevented the attempt being made." The first revelations had come to light in late October, but "more positive evidence" was disclosed in early November, and showed that the northern commander at Fortress Monroe, General J.G. Foster, knew about the conspiracy and had promised a force of cavalry to protect the rear of the released prisoners fleeing toward his lines. According to the *Examiner* account, the plot involved "the destruction of the arsenals, government works, the important bridges across the James, and the gunboats at the navy yard." The newspaper congratulated Richmond on its delivery from "such frightful scenes."¹³

¹¹ J.B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary at the Confederate States Capital* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1866), 2:91.

¹² *Richmond Examiner*, Nov. 23, 1863, p. 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1863, quoted in *New York Herald*, Nov. 27, 1863, p. 8.

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President Davis had this event in mind when preparing his message of February 3, 1864, to the Confederate Congress. "Twice," he stated, his government had received "secret and confidential information" of plots to release the Richmond prisoners. This foreknowledge had enabled the Confederates to adopt preventive measures to keep the Richmond prisoners confined. Davis then noted that northern papers were warning of a "deep-laid scheme" against the South. Benjamin F. Butler, who had recently succeeded Foster as commanding general of the United States Army, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, was perfecting some nefarious plot that would involve "servile insurrection," "incendiarism," and the "destruction of public works." Such danger required southern vigilance.¹⁴

Davis's concern was well-founded. At the time the Confederate president made these remarks, Butler was in the process of preparing to stage a raid on the Confederate capital aimed at freeing the prisoners and creating additional mischief. **This time, northern sources are available and make clear that the capture or murder of Davis and other Richmond leaders was part of the proposed raid.**

According to Butler, the idea for the raid came about when he received word from a northern spy in Richmond that the Confederates were planning to remove Federal prisoners in that city to a more inaccessible camp, Andersonville, in Georgia. The spy also reported that Richmond at that time was protected by only a few troops.¹⁵ As Butler later recalled, Brigadier General Isaac J. Wistar made the original suggestion to Butler, his commanding officer, that a body of troops, moving quickly, could seize a key bridge across the Chickahominy River, some twelve miles from Richmond, and then destroy Confederate entrenchments surrounding the lightly defended city.¹⁶ The strategy also called for "vigorous demonstrations" simultaneously by

¹⁴ O.R., Ser. IV, 3:67-70.

¹⁵ Benjamin F. Butler, *Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major-General Benj. F. Butler: Butler's Book* (Boston, 1892), 619-20 (hereafter, *Butler's Book*); "Miss Van Liew" to Butler, Jan. 25, 1864, *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler* (5 vols., Norwood, 1917), 3:331-32 (hereafter, Butler, *Correspondence*). The spy has been identified as Elizabeth Van Lew, in Virgil Carrington Jones, *Eight Hours before Richmond* (New York, 1957), 180.

¹⁶ *Butler's Book*, 619.



Isaac J. Wistar. Courtesy of the National Archives.

the Army of the Potomac, to keep Lee's Army of Northern Virginia occupied while Wistar attempted to move on Richmond.¹⁷

Although General John Sedgwick, acting commander of the Army of the Potomac, warned Butler that the poor condition of the road made a flanking movement by the Army of the Potomac impossible, and although he complained that Lee's army along the Rapidan was "so strongly entrenched" that demonstrations would not "disturb" Lee's position, Sedgwick received orders from Washington to provide the necessary demonstrations to divert Lee's forces.¹⁸

Butler planned to augment Wistar's troops by obtaining a cavalry unit under the command of Lafayette C. Baker, then stationed in Washington. In 1864 Baker was a colonel assigned to the War Department and in charge of what was called the National Detective Police,

¹⁷ Henry Halleck to Maj. Gen. John Sedgwick, Feb. 5, 1864 (telegram), "Letters, Telegrams, etc. Recd by Genl Meade, Vol. II (Nov. 5, 1863 to May 15, 1864)," p. 8, George G. Meade Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania). Sedgwick was acting commander of the Army of the Potomac at this time, while Meade was at home on sick leave. See Edwin Stanton to Benjamin Butler, Feb. 3, 1864 (telegram), Benjamin F. Butler Papers (Library of Congress).

¹⁸ Sedgwick to Butler, Feb. 4, 1864 (telegram), "Letters, Telegrams, etc. Sent by Genl Meade, Vol. III (Oct. 23, 1863, to May 1, 1864)," p. 140, Meade Papers; Sedgwick to Halleck, Feb. 5, 1864 (telegram), *ibid.*, p. 141; and Sedgwick to Butler, Feb. 5, 1864 (telegram), *ibid.*

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a special branch of the Department. The most sensational part of the National Detective Police was a unit composed of four companies of cavalry, commonly referred to as Baker's Rangers.¹⁹ These were the troops intended to assist Wistar's forces. Although he had permission of the Secretary of War to use Baker's Rangers, Butler failed to receive as many of them as he had expected.²⁰

Wistar's raid began on Saturday, February 6, 1864. According to Butler's official report, Wistar's troops arrived at the key bridge spanning the river at 2:20, Sunday morning. But the enemy was waiting there in force. At daybreak, Wistar saw that the bridge was heavily defended and the fords in the vicinity "effectively obstructed." After some skirmishing, Wistar concluded that he could capture the bridge, but "as the enemy had received some intimation of the approach of the expedition," the main object, "a dash at Richmond," had been thwarted. Wistar therefore gave the order to retreat.²¹

Disappointed, Butler sought causes for such a missed opportunity. He considered what he termed Lincoln's "misplaced clemency" a key element in the failure of the raid. A presidential order suspending executions in Butler's army had saved the life of one particular soldier convicted of murder. The commutation of this private's death sentence, in Butler's opinion, had made possible the raid's failure. Spared from execution, the imprisoned soldier bribed his jailer and escaped to the enemy four days before the scheduled Wistar raid. He alerted Confederates of Union preparations for the planned assault. Thus, the defenders had sufficient time to remove the wooden planks covering the bridge and fortify the nearby fords across the river. They also were able to bring up a large number of troops to confront Wistar's forces when he arrived at the bridge. Wistar later reminded Butler that the

¹⁹ Curtis Carroll Davis, "In Pursuit of Booth Once More: A New Claimant Heard From," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 89 (1984), 221; William E. Doster, *Lincoln and the Episodes of the Civil War* (New York, 1915), 126-27; L.C. Baker, *History of the United States Secret Service* (Philadelphia, 1868), 195-202; Samuel H. Merrill, *The Campaigns of the First Maine and District of Columbia Cavalry* (Portland, 1866), 227-30.

²⁰ Butler to Stanton, Jan. 25, 1864, and Butler to Gen. D.H. Rucker, Jan. 28, 1864, in Butler, *Correspondence*, 3:337, 343; Butler to Stanton, Jan. 30, 1864, Edwin M. Stanton Papers (microfilm) (Library of Congress).

²¹ Butler to Stanton, Feb. 8, 1864, *O.R.*, Ser. I, 33:143-44. For Wistar's report, see *ibid.*, 33:145-46.

deserter "would have been hung long ago but for the President's order suspending the execution of capital offenses." On the very day he received Wistar's report of the failure of the mission, Butler also obtained a copy of the *Richmond Examiner*, which told of the escaped prisoner's warning to the Confederates. That Yankee deserter, according to the *Examiner*, had alerted the Richmond authorities who then prepared to meet Wistar's assault.

Butler sent Lincoln a copy of Wistar's dispatch with a request that the president revoke his order suspending executions in Butler's department. Rather peremptorily, he asked that the president "answer by telegraph." If Lincoln obeyed that demand, the answer has not been found.²² It now seems dubious that an escaped convict from military prison would manage to possess enough specific information to enable southerners to prepare for Wistar's raid in the right places and at the right time. Yet it is possible that the Confederate spy system was much more effective than the Federals realized.

On the side of the Federals, the documentation varies. According to his autobiography, written many years later, Wistar's objective in penetrating the Richmond defenses was not unusual. The "plan," as Wistar later explained, with "minor features too numerous to relate," had been approved by Butler and "adopted by the War Department." It called for Wistar to stage a rapid movement that would surprise the defenders and enable Wistar's cavalry to enter the city. Once inside Richmond, he was expected to "destroy public property and communications, cutting wire, etc."²³

A document written at the time of the raid, however, is more specific concerning Wistar's instructions. In a note marked "private," and written just before the expedition set out for Richmond, Butler warned Wistar of the danger of the mission. One result could even be Wistar's death. "Have you subordinates," Butler asked, "that can take your place?" "Have they been so fully instructed in our plans as to escape

²² Butler to Stanton, Feb. 8, 1864, *ibid.*, 33:143; Butler to Lincoln, Feb. 8, 1864, *ibid.*, 33:144; Butler to Halleck, Feb. 12, 1864, *ibid.*, 33:144-45; and Wistar to Butler, Feb. 7, 1864, *ibid.*, 33:145-46. For Lincoln's order suspending executions in Butler's department, see *ibid.*, Ser. II, 6:683.

²³ Isaac Jones Wistar, *Autobiography of Isaac Jones Wistar, 1827-1905, Half a Century in War and Peace* (Philadelphia, 1937), 427.

confusion?" Butler's note also listed the three intended objectives of the raid:

- 1st. To relieve our prisoners who must otherwise, it seems to me, of necessity be starved. Lee is already asking his soldiers to live on half rations, can he give more to our soldier prisoners?
- 2nd. To destroy the public buildings, arsenals, tredegar [*sic*] Ironworks, depots, railroad equipage and commissary stocks of the Rebels and thus cripple their resources.
- 3rd. To capture some of the leaders of the rebellion, so that at least we can have means to meet their constant threats of retaliation and hanging of men white and black. If any of the more prominent can be brought off, I believe a blow will be given to the rebellion from which it will never recover.²⁴

The same subject matter contained in this confidential note to Wistar appeared in a report printed in the Richmond press on February 8. The headline in one paper read: "Discovery Of An Alleged Plot To Liberate The Prisoners And Assassinate The President—Arrest Of The Ringleaders And Seizure Of Documents." The article mentioned that the Richmond government had been aware for several days of a plot to murder Davis and liberate the prisoners at Libby and Belle Isle as well as destroy "Government buildings and workshops." The only difference between this account and Butler's instructions to Wistar is that this report called for Davis's murder, whereas Wistar had been instructed to kidnap prominent Confederate leaders. On Saturday, February 6, the very day Wistar set out on his expedition, Richmond authorities arrested A.W. Heinz, a German baker, accusing him of being the leader of a plot to assist Wistar's forces. A couple of weeks later, after the threat to Richmond had subsided, the press reported that Confederate military authorities had turned Heinz over to the civilian courts, where the case was promptly dismissed for lack of evidence. Confederate authorities no longer considered Heinz a northern agent. This incident suggests either that the Davis govern-

²⁴ Butler to Wistar, Feb. 4, 1864, Butler, *Correspondence*, 3:373-74. The day after he sent Wistar this private note, Butler wired him as follows: "Please destroy the paper of information which you will receive by the boat after you have read it. There are names in it that ought not to be risked by accident. I have a copy if needed." Butler to Wistar, Feb. 5, 1864 (telegram), "Confidential Letterbook, Dec. 1863 to Jan. 1865," p. 151, Butler Papers.

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ment had received advanced knowledge of Wistar's plans—and from a much more credible source than a convict escaping from military prison, as claimed by the Confederates—or that the timing of the Heinz arrest and the start of the Wistar raid represented an extraordinary coincidence.²⁵

According to the *New York Tribune* correspondent at Fortress Monroe, the objective of the Wistar raid was well-known at Butler's headquarters. The correspondent informed his managing editor two days after Wistar had set out for Richmond that "they were to reach Richmond at 5 a.m.—this morning[,] dash into the city—burn every public building[,] capture and kill whoever resisted them[,] liberate our prisoners, sack and destroy everything and return. We expect them here tomorrow (Monday) night."²⁶ Two days later, the *Tribune* reporter referred to the escaped prisoner credited in Richmond as having alerted the Confederates to the impending raid. He also made clear that the Butler headquarters expected the raid to be coordinated with a rising of Union supporters in the Confederate capital. The escaped prisoner, who was responsible for alerting the enemy, should have been hanged long ago, the Butler people felt. But he was one of some thirty condemned prisoners at Fortress Monroe "whom the Pres will not let us hang—because he says 'it keeps him awake nights.' The Union men in Rd were all ready at the signal *to rise*. It all goes back on to the *Pres*."²⁷

Both Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton were aware of the planned Wistar expedition. Butler came to Washington on January 19, 1864, and held interviews with Stanton and General Henry Halleck. On the following afternoon Butler had a long meeting with Lincoln. According to press accounts, the discussions dealt with the problem of prisoner exchange. When he left Washington on January 21, Butler was quoted as asserting that he would "have our prisoners

²⁵ *Evening Star*, Feb. 10, 1864, p. 1; *Richmond Examiner*, Feb. 8, 1864, p. 1; Feb. 19, 1864, p. 1; Feb. 20, 1864, p. 2; and Feb. 22, 1864, p. 1; *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, Feb. 19, 1864, p. 1; Feb. 22, 1864, p. 1.

²⁶ John J. Davenport to Sidney H. Gay, Feb. 7, 1864, Sidney H. Gay Papers (microfilm) (Columbia University).

²⁷ Davenport to Gay, Feb. 9, 1864, *ibid*.

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all released in less than a month."²⁸ Concerning his conversations with Lincoln and Stanton, a note from his chief of staff made clear that Butler was seeking additional troops for his projected raid. Written to Butler in Washington then conferring with his civilian superiors, the chief of staff advised: "Talk over the question of raising a big force in event anything else fails to go to Richmond. If you can get two or three regiments of cavalry, do."²⁹

It was shortly after he returned to headquarters that Butler asked Stanton for Baker's cavalry unit. Stanton approved, but three days later Butler complained that only 281 of Baker's men had turned up, and these, needed to act as pickets, arrived without tents.³⁰ Because Baker's units had come into being in 1863 to be used in part to protect important places in and around Washington,³¹ it is not likely that they would have been sent to Butler without the president's knowledge. Lincoln had always concerned himself with matters dealing with the security of the nation's capital.

As to the Confederate president, a document exists that names Davis as the prize victim of Butler's kidnapping scheme. James W. White, a New York Republican politician and ally of Horace Greeley, was visiting at Butler's headquarters at the time of Wistar's raid. White enjoyed Butler's confidence. On February 9, when he returned to Washington from Butler's camp, White sent Greeley a note, marked "private." In it, White described Butler as "in a state of great anxiety" concerning Wistar's expedition. The general had given White an explanation of the military procedures involved in the raid. White then explained that he would relate Butler's remarks, confident that Greeley would "not use them in any way that would compromise the

²⁸ Earl S. Miers, ed., *Lincoln Day by Day, A Chronology: 1809-1865* (3 vols., Washington, 1960), 3:234-35; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 20, 1864, p. 1; Jan. 21, 1864, p. 1; Jan. 22, 1864, p. 1. Many years later Butler recalled a meeting with Lincoln held in November 1863, in which the president good-naturedly warned Butler not to let Davis catch him. "He has put a price on your head," Lincoln said, and "will hang you sure." "That's a game two can play at," Butler replied. "If I get hold of him I shall give him the law of the outlaw after a reasonable time to say his prayers." Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time* (New York, 1885), 145-46.

²⁹ J.W. Shaffer to Butler, Jan. 19, 1864, Butler, *Correspondence*, 3:320-21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:337, 345-46.

³¹ For information concerning Baker's cavalry unit, see Baker to Horatio Seymour, July 24, 1863, *Miscellaneous Papers, "Seymour, Horatio"* (New-York Historical Society).

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General" or implicate White "in any breach of confidence if the facts shall continue contraband [i.e., military secrets]."³²

White then stressed that Butler had been urging officials in Washington to give him adequate forces, "cavalry especially," for the raid on Richmond. But all he could get was part of Baker's regiment. White explained that Butler set off on the raid even though he did not have all the troops he needed. The plan, according to White, called for one part of the raiders to release Union prisoners at Libby; a second to race to Belle Isle and free the soldiers there; and a third to "first capture Davis and then blow up the Tredegar Ironworks, the capitol and all the public buildings." Butler's written instructions to Wistar had included the objective of capturing "some of the leaders" of the Confederacy. White's note points to Davis as the principal candidate for abduction.

The plan failed, in White's view, presumably echoing Butler's sentiments; because Lincoln did not provide sufficient forces. "Had the President given Butler five thousand men, (and he could have given him twenty thousand)," White argued, "the expedition would have succeeded."³³ President Lincoln was perhaps annoyed by the lack of cooperation given by the Army of the Potomac to assist Wistar's raid. General Sedgwick had submitted a report in which he referred to "vigorous demonstrations" then being conducted by his forces to keep Lee occupied while Wistar was moving on Richmond. Unsympathetic to the concept of the raid, Sedgwick observed in the final paragraph of his dispatch that cooperation with Wistar's forces had destroyed the "best chance" that the Army of the Potomac had for a "successful attack" against Lee on the Rapidan. That sentence troubled Lincoln. "The President," General Halleck telegraphed Sedgwick from Washington, "directs that you report what this 'best chance' was; what 'successful attack' was proposed; when it was to be executed, and how it had been spoiled by your co-operation with General Butler."³⁴

³² James W. White to Horace Greeley, Feb. 9, 1864, Gay Papers.

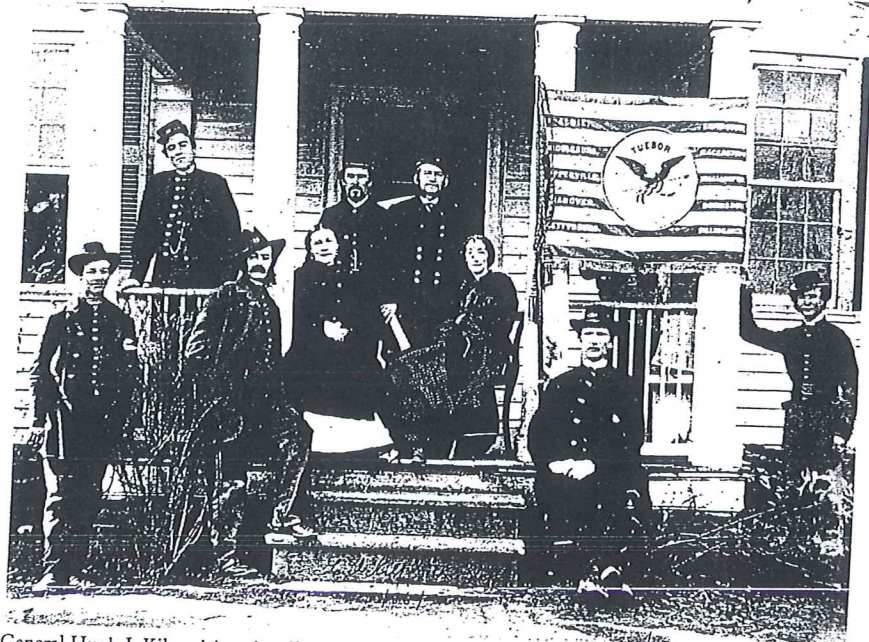
³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Sedgwick to Butler, Feb. 7, 1864, "Letters . . . Sent by Genl Meade, Vol. III," pp. 144-45, Meade Papers; Halleck to Sedgwick, Feb. 11, 1864, *O.R.*, Ser. I, 33:552.

Lincoln was upset. The Wistar raid had failed. But the idea of a surprise attack on Richmond that would rescue the prisoners still seemed to be an attractive possibility. The next attempt would be staged from the Army of the Potomac. This was the well-known Kilpatrick raid on Richmond that took place at the end of February and the first week of March 1864. General Kilpatrick had the previous year served as colonel under Stoneman. He had led his forces to within two miles of the Richmond city limits. According to Emory Thomas's recent account of this incident, the dash by Federal cavalry was made with the president's approval. If successful, the Union forces were expected to liberate prisoners of war and strike "a blow at the Confederacy." The attempt failed, with heavy casualties, including the death of Colonel Ulric Dahlgren, son of the famous Civil War admiral, John A. Dahlgren. The younger Dahlgren was shot in the back during an ambush. On his body Confederates found papers embarrassing to the United States government. One document, addressed to "Officers and Men," mentioned that after freeing the prisoners on Belle Isle, the troops were to "cross the James River into Richmond, destroying the bridges . . . and exhorting the prisoners to destroy and burn the hateful city; and . . . not allow the Rebel leader Davis and his traitorous crew to escape." The second document, in the same hand, included one extraordinary sentence: "The men must keep together and well in hand, and once in the city it must be destroyed and Jeff Davis and Cabinet killed."³⁵

When the Confederate government published copies of these Dahlgren papers, primarily to convince Europeans of Yankee depravity, Federal authorities insisted that the Dahlgren papers, if genuine, did not reflect the policy of the government. Dahlgren had received no such orders. Washington officials did not advocate the wanton destruction of the southern capital or the murder of southern leaders. Emory Thomas, in his article on the raid, denied the authenticity of the Dahlgren documents and found "consoling" the fact that although Lincoln had approved the raid, he had not advocated Davis's murder.

³⁵ Emory M. Thomas, "The Kilpatrick-Dahlgren Raid—Part I," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 16 (Feb. 1978), 4-9, 46-48; and Thomas, "The Kilpatrick-Dahlgren Raid—Part II," *ibid.*, 17 (April 1978), 26-33. For an earlier account, see Jones, *Eight Hours before Richmond*, passim.



General Hugh J. Kilpatrick and staff, 1864. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Commandery Military Order of the Loyal Legion and the U.S. Army Military History Institute.

“The fact that both sides of the American Civil War abhorred such tactics,” concluded Thomas, was a “measure of their innocence.”³⁶

The similarities of this attempt with the earlier Wistar raid are too evident to exonerate the Washington administration without further examination. Kilpatrick had been involved in the Stoneman dash and had come closest to the point where, in Lincoln’s words, he could have “safely gone in and burnt every thing & brought us Jeff Davis.” It had been claimed that Kilpatrick had been able to get Lincoln’s ear through the influence of friends well-placed in Washington.³⁷ Yet it

³⁶ Thomas, “Kilpatrick-Dahlgren Raid—Part II,” 33.

³⁷ Lincoln to Joseph Hooker, May 8, 1863, Lincoln, *Collected Works*, 6:202-3; Jones, *Eight Hours before Richmond*, 25-27; Thomas, “Kilpatrick-Dahlgren Raid—Part I,” 8. For an unflattering evaluation of Kilpatrick’s raid, see John Edward Pierce, “General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick in the American Civil War: A New Appraisal” (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1983), 191-234.

is known, nevertheless, that Lincoln did ask Kilpatrick to appear at the White House, either on his own or as a result of Kilpatrick's suggestion. News of the interview spread rapidly in army circles. As General Meade later explained, while he was in Washington in the middle of February, he learned from the Secretary of War that Lincoln had sent for Kilpatrick (an officer under Meade's command). On February 15, a correspondent of the *New York Tribune* sent a "sacredly confidential" note to his editor, reporting from army headquarters that he had learned about the projected incursion. Kilpatrick had been "called to Washington on special business," and, as a result, he was scheduled "to lead a monster raid." On March 1, an officer on Meade's staff noted in his diary that "some expedition or raid was on the tapis. . . . Kilpatrick is sent for by the President, . . . everybody knows it at once."³⁸

The twenty-eight-year-old Kilpatrick met Lincoln at the Executive Mansion on February 13. At the end of the interview, Kilpatrick crossed over to the War Department where he conferred with Stanton, as Kilpatrick described it, "by direction of the President." According to his subsequent explanation, Kilpatrick outlined to Stanton his plan to distribute copies of Lincoln's amnesty proclamation to Confederate soldiers and civilians in the Richmond area, destroy Confederate communications, and release the prisoners.³⁹

As for Lincoln's hope to publicize his amnesty proclamation behind enemy lines and among enemy troops, it was considered part of the operation, at least in the early stages of the planning.⁴⁰ This was the famous Amnesty Proclamation of December 8, 1863, containing Lincoln's 10 percent plan. The document provided that, with a few notable exceptions, Confederates could receive full pardon for their secessionist errors. Soldiers and citizens alike would be able to retain their property, except for slaves, upon taking a prescribed oath. When-

³⁸ Meade to Adj. Gen. of the Army, April 8, 1864, "Letters . . . Sent by Genl Meade, Vol. III," p. 169, Meade Papers; T.C. Grey to Sidney Gay, Feb. 15, 1864, Gay Papers; George R. Agassiz, ed., *Meade's Headquarters, 1863-1865: Letters of Colonel Theodore Lyman, from the Wilderness to Appomattox* (Boston, 1922), 76.

³⁹ Hugh J. Kilpatrick to E.B. Parsons, Feb. 16, 1864, *O.R.*, Ser. I, 33:172-73; Miers, ed., *Lincoln Day by Day*, 3:239.

⁴⁰ Meade to Adj. Gen. of the Army, April 8, 1864, "Letters . . . Sent by Genl Meade, Vol. III," p. 169, Meade Papers; T.C. Grey to Sidney Gay, Feb. 15, 1864, Gay Papers.



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ever the number of voters in a seceded state taking the oath equaled 10 percent of the number of persons who had voted in that state in the 1860 election, that state could organize a state government and petition for full restoration to the Union.⁴¹

Although he might originally have intended that Kilpatrick's raiders would distribute copies of his proclamation within Confederate lines, Lincoln availed himself of less dramatic means of attaining that end. A couple of days before meeting with Kilpatrick, Lincoln invited Colonel Russell A. Alger to Washington to discuss ways of distributing copies of the proclamation. Alger submitted a plan on February 9, as requested. He recommended that scouts carry printed copies within the enemy's lines and that cavalry expeditions be sent out and leave copies "at every house possible." If he could be placed in charge of a cavalry regiment, Alger would see to it, so he claimed, that the plan would be carried into effect. On February 23, a week before the Kilpatrick raid took place, Alger left Washington for Butler's army, taking with him printed copies of the proclamation.⁴²

The sequence of events is important here. Lincoln's interview with Kilpatrick occurred *after* he had met with Alger. If Lincoln had stressed the importance of distributing copies of his proclamation, the distribution was no longer of prime consideration at the time Kilpatrick began preparations for his raid.⁴³

This intent to circulate copies of the amnesty proclamation was decried by Kilpatrick's military superior, who also opposed the planned raid. Major General Alfred Pleasonton, Commander of Cavalry for the Army of the Potomac, had found Kilpatrick's proposal "not feasible at this time." Pleasonton recalled that Stoneman's raid had been of

⁴¹ Lincoln, *Collected Works*, 7:53-56.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7:176-77.

⁴³ It seems that the main task of disseminating the president's proclamation was assigned to Alger, who received the following instructions from the War Department: "Having been detached from your Regiment for special service, by instructions from the President, the Secretary of War directs that you take charge of a number of copies of the Proclamation . . . dated December 8, 1863, which you will distribute in such manner as you deem most effective to reach the rebel armies and inhabitants. You will report to the commanding General within whose command you may be operating for the time and this is authority for asking of him such aid and protection, in your duties as may be consistent with the interest of the service." E.D. Townsend, Asst. Adj. Gen., to Col. R.A. Alger, Feb. 14, 1864 (copy), Butler Papers.

slight military value. The cavalry could have been of greater service had it remained attached to Hooker's army. Whatever damage the Stoneman raiders had caused, according to Pleasonton, had been repaired in a few days. As to the desired distribution of copies of the president's proclamation, Pleasonton was confident that he could have them circulated "in any section of Virginia" desired—"even Richmond." Indeed, according to information in his possession, the proclamation was already "freely circulating" in that state.⁴⁴ Pleasonton found no justification for Kilpatrick's project. Clearly, the impetus for the raid came from Washington, and in spite of the reservations of the military.

Ulric Dahlgren, whose untimely death during the raid created so much sorrow and embarrassment, was a young man—not yet twenty-two years old—when he died. He had been a favorite of President Lincoln, and had been with the president at the White House on February 1, 1864, a few weeks before the tragic raid. This was about the time Dahlgren had recovered from a wound that had cost him the loss of a leg. There is no evidence that Lincoln and Dahlgren discussed the raid on Richmond at that meeting. Lincoln had squeezed in the session with Dahlgren while he was being shaved. It seems that their conversation centered about some concerns of Dahlgren's famous father.⁴⁵

When the Kilpatrick raid failed, and when the Confederates found the papers on Dahlgren's body instructing his troops to burn down the Confederate capital and kill Jefferson Davis, the Richmond authorities published the texts of these orders and had photostatic copies distributed in Europe for propaganda purposes.⁴⁶ The official explanation as to who authorized these activities is unambiguous. Under a flag of truce, General Lee sent Meade "photographic copies" of the Dahlgren

⁴⁴ Alfred Pleasonton to A.A. Humphries, Feb. 17, 1864, *O.R.*, Ser. I, 33:171-72.

⁴⁵ *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (6 vols., New York, 1887-1889), 2:53-54; Ulric Dahlgren to John A. Dahlgren, Feb. 1, 1864, John A. Dahlgren Papers (Library of Congress).

⁴⁶ James O. Hall, "The Dahlgren Papers: A Yankee Plot to Kill President Davis," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 22 (Nov. 1983), 30-39. Hall presents convincing evidence that the documents were not forgeries. For a description of the death of Dahlgren and the finding of the papers on his body, see the report in Edward O. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (rpt. ed., Freeport, 1970), 504-6.



Colonel Ulric Dahlgren. Courtesy of the National Archives.

papers and inquired if these actions had been "authorized by the United States government, or by [Dahlgren's] superior officers."⁴⁷ Meade's denial was emphatic. "Neither the United States Government, myself, nor General Kilpatrick authorized, sanctioned, or approved the burning of . . . Richmond and the killing of Mr. Davis and Cabinet, nor any other act not required by military necessity."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Robert E. Lee to George Meade, April 1, 1864 (copy), Series 60, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group no. 94 (National Archives).

⁴⁸ Meade to Lee, April 16, 1864, *O.R.*, Ser. I, 33:180.



General George G. Meade. Courtesy of the National Archives.

Meade also forwarded to Lee a letter written by Kilpatrick that stressed that Dahlgren had "received no orders from me to pillage, burn, or kill, nor were any such instructions given me by my superiors."⁴⁹ Officially, everybody's reputation was safe—except that of Dahlgren, now dead.

In his private correspondence, though, Meade had a different story to relate. In writing home to his wife, Meade described the affair as "an ugly piece of business." Kilpatrick's statement, which Meade had sent along to Lee, had not only denied that Dahlgren's superiors were implicated, but had even questioned the authenticity of the published Dahlgren papers. But Meade knew better. Kilpatrick's reputation, as well as "collateral evidence" in Meade's possession, "rather go against this theory" that the documents found on Dahlgren's body were forgeries. As he explained to his wife, Meade was bothered that in

⁴⁹ Hugh J. Kilpatrick to Brig. Gen. S. Williams, April 16, 1864, *ibid.*

denying any authority or sanction for Dahlgren's plans, he was necessarily throwing "odium on Dahlgren." "However," Meade concluded, "I was determined my skirts should be clear, so I promptly disavowed having ever authorized, sanctioned, or approved of any act not required by military necessity, and in accordance with the usages of war."⁵⁰

As noted above, the president and Secretary of War were involved in the planning of the Kilpatrick raid, a fact well-known in the army. On the eve of the assault, Meade's chief of staff informed Kilpatrick "that no detailed instructions are given you since the plan of your operation has been proposed by yourself with the sanction of the President and Secretary of War."⁵¹ Lincoln was even guilty of hinting to outsiders that the impending raid was imminent. The head of the Washington bureau of the *New York Tribune* informed his editor that "the only knowledge I had of it was just a hint at the Navy Dept., coming from the President that such a raid 'might occur very soon.'⁵² For the second time within a month, Lincoln and Stanton were involved in planning an expedition against Richmond.

Just as Meade had scoffed at the claim that the Dahlgren papers were forgeries, other officers in his army had likewise been convinced of their authenticity. The Provost Marshal General, for example, had recorded in his diary a conversation with a fellow officer who assured him that the papers were "correct," that they corresponded with what Dahlgren had told him before the raid began.⁵³ Another officer wrote in his diary that Kilpatrick had received the assignment to attack Richmond, "liberate the prisoners, catch all the rebel M.C.'s that are lying round loose, and make tracks to our nearest lines."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Meade to Margaret Meade, April 18, 1864, Meade Papers. The significant portion of this letter appears in George Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade, Major-General United States Army*, ed. George Gordon Meade (2 vols., New York, 1913), 2:190-91.

⁵¹ A.A. Humphries to Hugh Kilpatrick, Feb. 27, 1864, "Letters . . . sent by Genl Meade, Vol. III," p. 54-55, Meade Papers. Meade did all he could to aid Kilpatrick and thus avoided the presidential rebuke accorded Sedgwick following the Wistar failure. See A.A. Humphries to Maj. Gen. Hunt, *ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵² A.H. Byngton to Sidney Gay, March 14, 1864, Gay Papers.

⁵³ David S. Sparks, ed., *Inside Lincoln's Army: The Diary of Marsena Rudolph Patrick, Provost Marshal General, Army of the Potomac* (New York, 1964), 347-48.

⁵⁴ Agassiz, ed., *Meade's Headquarters*, 76. Writing shortly after the war, a chaplain connected with some army units involved in the incident wrote that the aim of the raiders was in part to "secure Jeff. Davis." Merrill, *Campaigns of the First Maine*, 177.

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Some details of the impending raid were known by people in no way connected with it. Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, concluded in his diary that "the raid was not a wise and well planned scheme." He added that he did not know whether or not the War Department had advised it. He had, however, "heard it spoken of indefinitely and vaguely, but with no certainty till the expedition had started."⁵⁵

The always enterprising *New York Herald* had a good part of the story at the time the raid was taking place. On March 3, even before the paper had learned the results of the raid, the *Herald* printed a story about the expedition, under a provocative headline that read in part, "The Union Prisoners To Be Released And The Rebel Capital Sacked." Thanks to the work of one of its correspondents, the paper had parts of the story as early as February 29. The editor, however, refrained from printing an account until satisfied that its publication would not adversely affect the raid's chances of success. By March 3, it was deemed safe to publish the report, even though the outcome of the attack was still unknown. The paper quoted its correspondent as follows:

there can be no impropriety in stating that Kilpatrick started to make a dash upon Richmond, for the purpose of releasing our prisoners there, sacking the rebel capital, and effecting such other laudable purposes as might be within his power.⁵⁶

A few days later, the *Herald's* story was picked up by the Richmond press. Confederates found no difficulty in interpreting the expression "effecting such other laudable purposes." The papers found on Dahlgren's body provided the explanation.

Such is the confirmation [reported the Richmond *Sentinel*] that comes to us from the enemy, while yet they hoped for Kilpatrick's success. It shows that Dahlgren's infamy did not begin or die with *him*, and that he was but the willing instrument for executing an atrocity which his superiors had carefully approved and sanctioned. Truly there is no depth of dishonor and villainy to which Lincoln and his agents are not capable of descending.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Howard K. Beale, ed., *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson* (3 vols., New York, 1960), 1:538.

⁵⁶ *New York Herald*, March 3, 1864, p. 1.

⁵⁷ *Richmond Sentinel*, March 7, 1864, p. 1; March 8, 1864, p. 2.

Reaction of northern newspapers to the aims of the Kilpatrick raid was predictable. The Democratic press tended to condemn it; Republican papers exhibited little concern as to its moral implications. Philadelphia's Democratic daily, *The Age*, denounced what it called "black flag warfare." The editorial writer explained that he particularly objected to Republican newspapers that did not even bother to justify Dahlgren's intentions. *The Age* concluded that it was necessary to condemn both the administration and its supporters in the press, who had published the Dahlgren papers "without a word of dissent, or criticism, or rebuke."⁵⁸ Republican papers suspected that the documents found on Dahlgren's body were forgeries, broadcast for propaganda purposes.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, in a signed article appearing in the weekly *Independent*, Horace Greeley, publisher of the Republican *New York Tribune*, recoiled at the callousness evident in much of the northern press concerning schemes to sack cities and murder Confederate political leaders. He was concerned with what the war was doing to Americans. He wrote:

And a Civil War is peculiarly calculated to arouse passions and excite enmities that are not satiated by inevitable carnage of the battlefield. Unless great care is taken, a strife wherein "a man's foes are those of his own household" tends to become a horrid round of reciprocal and wholesale murders.⁶⁰

Lincoln left no written record dealing with the Wistar and Kilpatrick raids. But he showed concern for Dahlgren's safety and grieved at the news of his death. For a week after the raid, official Washington could learn nothing about the colonel's fate. Then, on March 7, when Gideon Welles visited the office of Admiral Dahlgren, he was followed shortly by Lincoln and Stanton. They brought with them a telegram from Butler, incorrectly announcing that the admiral's son was "alive

⁵⁸ Philadelphia *Age*, March 11, 1864, p. 2.

⁵⁹ For reaction in the Republican press, see *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 9, 1864, p. 2; March 10, 1864, p. 3; *New York Times*, March 10, 1864, p. 4; *New York Tribune*, March 12, 1864, p. 6; Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, March 14, 1864, p. 2; Philadelphia *Inquirer*, March 11, 1864, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Quoted in the Washington *National Intelligencer*, March 23, 1864, p. 1. *The Independent*, a Republican weekly, however, considered the papers to be forgeries. *The Independent*, March 24, 1864, p. 4.

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and well."⁶¹ Welles observed that "all were gratified," and that "the President was much affected." However, on the next morning, after reading an account of Dahlgren's death appearing in the March 5 edition of the Richmond *Sentinel*, Lincoln could no longer doubt the report of young Dahlgren's death. He deemed it "his duty" to communicate that sad fact to Admiral Dahlgren, "which he at once did."⁶²

Stanton's reaction to the failure of these raids is unknown. The War Department came into possession of the original Dahlgren papers, along with thousands of other documents, when the Confederacy collapsed. In November 1865, after Lincoln's death, Stanton ordered that the Dahlgren papers be forwarded to him from the bureau in charge of captured Confederate archives. He received them on December 1, 1865. No record of these papers exists since that December day when they were handed to Stanton. Historian James O. Hall, who has searched for these originals in the War Department files as well as among the Stanton papers, admits to a lingering "suspicion" that Stanton "consigned them to the fireplace in his office."⁶³

Perhaps of some significance is the treatment accorded the Kilpatrick raid in the multi-volume Lincoln biography written by his two secretaries, John G. Nicolay and John Hay. Their life of Lincoln was an "official" one in which their writing had to meet the approval of Lincoln's son. The secretaries also had agreed between themselves to produce a work that was in no way uncomplimentary to their subject. "We are Lincoln men all through," Hay once reminded Nicolay.⁶⁴ In dealing with the Kilpatrick expedition, Nicolay and Hay described it as one of "a few scattered raids" that "broke the monotony" of the winter of 1864, while the armies were in winter quarters. This particular raid, they reported, struck at the Virginia Central Railroad, with parties sent out to "destroy roads and bridges." By March 1, the raiders had "come in view of the fortifications of Richmond" producing

⁶¹ Beale, ed., *Diary of Gideon Welles*, 1:536.

⁶² *New York Times*, March 8, 1864, p. 2; *Evening Star*, March 7, 1864, p. 2; *Public Ledger*, March 9, 1864, p. 1.

⁶³ Hall, "Dahlgren Papers," 38-39.

⁶⁴ Benjamin P. Thomas, *Portrait for Posterity: Lincoln and His Biographers* (New Brunswick, 1947), 98.

"terror and panic in the Confederate capital." "But as a matter of course," their account continued, the raiders "could do nothing against the system of works" surrounding Richmond. The "most grievous" of the "cost and loss of the expedition" was the death of Dahlgren, "whose personal gifts and graces of character, . . . and talents as an officer, had greatly endeared him to the President."⁶⁵

That paragraph in the Nicolay and Hay work covered a period when Hay was out of Washington. He was then in Florida on special assignment for the president. But he was back in the capital on March 24, 1864, at a time when the Dahlgren papers were still news.⁶⁶ The other secretary, Nicolay, remained in Washington while Hay was away. That Nicolay and Hay would devote a paragraph to Dahlgren in which they distorted the aims of the raid (it surely was not intended merely to destroy roads and bridges), omitted reference to Lincoln's role in its initiation, and remained silent on the topic of the Dahlgren papers suggests that the Kilpatrick expedition was an incident they perhaps preferred not to dwell on.

Despite the cursory treatment by Nicolay and Hay, one can conclude that Lincoln was involved in the planning of the Kilpatrick raid, as well as the previous one led by Wistar. Both raids had as objectives, with or without the president's consent, the freeing of prisoners and the kidnapping or murder of prominent Confederates, including Davis. The "Laws of War," as understood during the Civil War, apparently made legally justifiable the abduction of the Confederate president. "Military necessity" allowed for the "capturing" of "every armed enemy, and every enemy of importance to the hostile government." But "a subject of the hostile government" could not be proclaimed "an outlaw, who may be slain without trial."⁶⁷ If Lincoln knew of the efforts to abduct Davis, he could claim his action justifiable, based on military necessity. The murder of Davis, however, would have represented a different category. But no document connects him directly to Dahlgren's planned assassination attempt.

⁶⁵ John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (10 vols., New York, 1890), 8:251-52.

⁶⁶ Tyler Dennett, ed., *Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay* (New York, 1939), 154-66.

⁶⁷ Robert N. Scott, comp., *An Analytical Digest of the Military Laws of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1873), 443 (no. 1155), and 459 (no. 1288).

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Tragically, the unsuccessful attacks resulted in the removal of most of the Richmond prisoners to Andersonville. The attempts also contributed to a turn in the struggle toward what one Richmond paper called "war under the Black Flag."⁶⁸ When southerners were condemned later for the massacre of black Union soldiers at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, another Richmond newspaper was quick to pick up the challenge. It reminded northerners that they had planned to burn Richmond and assassinate its political leaders. Now, with their denunciation of the Fort Pillow massacre, these same Yankees were guilty of turning that which they once held as "legitimate war fare . . . into barbarous murder when perpetrated by us."⁶⁹ The war had become ugly.

Confederate leaders were horrified by what they read in the Dahlgren papers. In his proclamation for a day of fasting and prayer, issued on March 14, 1864, President Davis took pride in noting that a "nefarious scheme to burn and plunder" Richmond and put to death "the chosen servants of the people, had been baffled and set at naught."⁷⁰ In a report of the operations of the War Department, written April 28, 1864, James A. Seddon, Confederate Secretary of War, denounced these Federal raids and left no doubt as to whom he considered ultimately responsible for their planning:

that such horrors should have been deliberately planned and ordered by the authorities of any people professing to be civilized and Christian, must inflict an indelible stigma of hypocrisy and infamy.⁷¹

It could well be that Confederate attempts to kidnap Lincoln that culminated with his assassination were a direct result of northern efforts to kill Davis. Federal authorities were always certain that the Davis government had been implicated in the murder of Lincoln. Shortly after Booth's attack on Lincoln, and even before the president died, Stanton assumed that the Richmond authorities had approved

⁶⁸ *Richmond Whig*, March 7, 1864, p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Richmond Examiner*, April 22, 1864, p. 2.

⁷⁰ *New York Daily News*, March 17, 1864, p. 1.

⁷¹ O.R., Ser. IV, 3:326. Judah P. Benjamin, Confederate Secretary of State, informed the Confederate agent in Paris that the Dahlgren papers reflected the "infamous character of the warfare waged against us." Benjamin to John Slidell, March 22, 1864, James D. Richardson, comp., *The Messages and Papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy, Including Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865* (2 vols., New York, 1966), 2:639-40.

the assassination. Relying mainly on a letter found in Booth's hotel room, in which the writer advised Booth not to act hastily, but first "see how it will be taken at R———d," Stanton released a statement accusing Davis of involvement in Booth's plot.⁷² This belief found its way into the official charge against the alleged conspirators tried before a military commission in May 1865 for Lincoln's murder. The defendants were accused of "maliciously, unlawfully, and traitorously" conspiring with Jefferson Davis and others "to kill and murder . . . Abraham Lincoln." Four of them were hanged for this crime; the others received prison terms.⁷³ But the attempt to link Davis with the Lincoln assassination failed. Federal authorities could produce no evidence that Confederate leaders in Richmond had been involved in Booth's plot.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, Lincoln's attraction to the notion, back in 1863, that Stoneman's raiders could have moved into Richmond and brought back Jefferson Davis, and Lincoln's involvement in the planning of the Wistar and Kilpatrick raids, can well implicate him in the fighting under the "black flag."

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⁷² Edwin Stanton to John A. Dix, April 15, 1865, quoted in *Public Ledger*, April 17, 1865, p. 1; Stanton to Dix, April 24, 1865, in *ibid.*, April 25, 1865, p. 1. Stanton's charge was based on the letter, Samuel Arnold to John Wilkes Booth, March 27, 1865, Exhibit no. 43, roll no. 15, Investigation and Trial Papers Relating to the Assassination of President Lincoln (microcopy no. 599) (National Archives).

⁷³ Benn Pitman, comp., *The Assassination of President Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators* (New York, 1954), 18-19.

⁷⁴ Hanchett, *Lincoln Murder Conspiracies*, 59-89.