

logistical problems, but because he relies almost entirely on the brief report of Sherman's quartermaster he does so in such a superficial way as to give a misleading view of those problems and the role they played in Sherman's operations. Finally, he credits Sherman with the employment of improvised fortifications when making assaults whereas it was his troops who did this on their own initiative, sometimes even carrying logs with them while advancing, and his account of the tactics used by the Federals in their attack at Kennesaw Mountain reveals only that he knows little what actually occurred in this battle, having obtained most of this information from Moseley's aforementioned dissertation, which in turn makes several major errors in its treatment of the subject.

It is unfortunate that a book that has been nearly twenty-five years in the making and which contains so much that is original and valuable should be marred by such flaws. Otherwise it would be even more what it is in spite of these flaws—a work from which all who are seriously interested in the military history of the Civil War can and certainly will learn much that is worth learning.

ALBERT CASTEL

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Come Retribution: The Confederate Secret Service and the Assassination of Lincoln. By William A. Tidwell, with James O. Hall and David Winfred Gaddy. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988. Pp. xv, 510. \$38.50 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)

Like other readers of this journal, I have often been asked whether anything really new can be said about the Civil War. Replies that speak of revisionist interpretations, new perspectives, enriched syntheses, and the like tend to leave the questioner unsatisfied with this professional jargon. But with the publication of *Come Retribution*, we can now point to a genuinely new study of the Confederate secret service and its relationship to Lincoln's assassination.

The reader must be warned, though, that this book promises more than it can deliver. Its argument suffers from problems of evidence and exposition. The authors—a retired CIA officer, a Defense Department intelligence analyst, and a Lincoln-assassination aficionado—are up front about the first problem: "There is no documentary evidence that directly proves Confederate involvement . . . in the Lincoln assassination. . . . The evidence presented in this book is largely circumstantial" (p. xiii). Despite this caveat, the authors use their experience as intelligence analysts to patch together hundreds of pieces of information, some of them from previously undiscovered sources; to form a pattern that points "toward a central role for Jefferson Davis in the clandestine warfare of the 1860s—and the fateful

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Service and the Assassination
by O. Hall and David Winfred
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act that ended it" (pp. xiv–xv). The unwary reader is likely to be convinced by this pattern; even the wary reader cannot help but be swayed by it. But the careful reader will note the authors' frequent use of such phrases as "could have been," "was doubtless," "must have been," "appears to have," and the like. There is no smoking gun here to prove the direct involvement of the Confederate secret service in Lincoln's assassination, nor to prove that Davis authorized or knew about such a plot if one existed. The authors make a plausible case, but the canny reader will render the Scotch verdict: Not Proven.

The writing style makes this book hard going. It is in fact two books stitched together awkwardly by three authors with varying skills. The first half portrays the operations of sundry secret service agencies of the Confederate War and State Departments. The second half links these activities to the Confederate plot in 1864–65 to kidnap Lincoln and hold him as a bargaining chip for peace negotiations or the return of Confederate prisoners of war, a plot whose failure led to the more desperate act of assassination. In the hands of a skillful writer, this would be a dramatic, gripping story. But the authors present it as if they were writing a detailed intelligence report to their superior officer. Like graduate students writing the first draft of a dissertation, they cram in every fact they have found in their ten years of research. Indeed, some of the same facts get crammed in repeatedly, in different parts of the book, probably a result of three authors each doing his own thing. The consequence is a maze of information difficult to find one's way through.

But the effort is worth it. For despite these shortcomings, historians will find new and important material in this book. The theory of Confederate involvement in Lincoln's murder is not new, of course. The U.S. government tried to establish Confederate complicity in 1865, but its case fell apart in revelations of perjured testimony by key witnesses. Since then a dozen or so different "grand conspiracy" theories about the assassination have been put forth, each of them summarized and demolished in William Hanchett's excellent book *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies* (1983). The consensus of historians today is that Lincoln was murdered as a result not of a grand conspiracy but of a petty conspiracy by Booth and his small-time hangers-on in Washington and Maryland. The authors of *Come Retribution*, however, have pumped vigorous new life into the Confederate grand conspiracy thesis. Other recent scholarship has established Booth's role in a Confederate plot to kidnap Lincoln. But *Come Retribution* provides fuller information than any previous study on the espionage activities of the Confederate signal corps and the courier line it established from Washington to Richmond through southern Maryland. This was the route by which a kidnapped Lincoln was to be brought to Richmond, and it was the route Booth took in his attempt to escape. The authors also document the role in the kidnapping and related plots of Mosby's partisan rangers, who contrib-

uted Lewis Powell (alias Lewis Paine, who tried to kill Seward) to the enterprise. As a CIA veteran, William Tidwell writes knowledgeably about the "Department of Dirty Tricks" in the Confederate secret service. In addition to such well-known exploits as the St. Albans raid, the attempt to burn New York hotels, and other operations mounted from Canada, this book describes the mining of Potomac estuaries and the attempt of a Confederate agent to start a yellow fever epidemic in Washington by smuggling in infected clothing and bedding (yellow fever cannot be transmitted this way, but nobody knew that in the 1860s). Evidence for these activities is firm rather than merely circumstantial.

Most fascinating—and chilling—is the authors' account of a Confederate plan to blow up the White House with Lincoln in it. This was to happen in mid-April 1865, after the failure of kidnapping efforts. It was to be a final desperate move to disrupt the Union command system and enable Confederate armies to break free from Grant's and Sherman's grip. It was also designed as retribution for all the destruction Lincoln and his minions had inflicted on the South (the Confederates had recently installed the phrase "Come Retribution" as the key for their cipher system). But Union cavalry captured the explosives team a few miles from the capital as Mosby's rangers were trying to infiltrate them into Washington on April 10. When Booth learned of this failure, the authors speculate, he put his own last-resort plan into operation.

A Confederate explosives expert was captured with some of Mosby's men on April 10. And the confession of George Atzerodt (the man assigned to kill Andrew Johnson), missing for more than a century but discovered and authenticated by the authors, mentioned a plan to blow up the White House. Apart from this piece of evidence, the linkage of the captured explosives expert to such a plot is speculative, Booth's relationship to the affair more so, and Jefferson Davis's knowledge or authorization of these activities even more speculative. (The linkage of Judah Benjamin to some of these operations rests on firmer evidence; that may be why Benjamin fled the re-United States and never returned.) In any event, *Come Retribution* provides plenty of food for thought. It really does say something new about the Civil War.

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Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom. By Peter Kolchin. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987. Pp. xiv, 517. \$27.00.)

Consider that Russian serfdom and U.S. slavery both emerged from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively, "under conditions of la-