

FIFTY-SEVEN YEARS AGO --- April 15, 1865

Booth's Bullet's Effect on Troops Then in Field

BY GEORGE B. LAUD

Recorder, Police Judge, Culver, City, Col.; Past Department Commander of New York G. A. R.; President Third Massachusetts Cavalry Association; President, McKinley Square Pole and Flag Association; Empire State Society Sons of American Revolution; New York State Society of Mayflower Descendants; Lecturer Board of Education of New York, 1895-1920.

FIFTY-SEVEN years ago, April 15, 1865, the nation was robbed in mourning and shrouded in gloom and sorrow by the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, and his funeral casket was drenched with a nation's tears. His tragic death in the path of duty, though a costly sacrifice on the Altar of Freedom, added the crowning glory of a martyr to the spotless fame of the patriot, and caused a world to sigh in pity and all civilized nations to crave the privilege of dropping a tear on his tomb.

On the night of April 14, 1865, John Wilkes Booth fired that awful bullet, and shortly after the first rays of the golden sunshine drifted into his window, the Angel of Death kissed down the eyelids of Abraham Lincoln, and the hands which had wrought such noble work in life and had never been stained by an ignoble deed, were folded across his breast, and peacefully as a little child that great heart, whose religion had been love of humanity, passed into unending love of God.

On that morning—April 15—the news flashed across the wires of the civilized world, so shaking the social system of our country with the terrible tidings that all loyal hearts were filled with a dreadful suspense which made them tremble with the palsy of direful forebodings, and even the South, till then so embittered in the despair of a threatened defeat, lifted up its hands in horror, fearful of the result of such a useless deed of murder.

Among the troops in our camp at Terre Bonne, La., the effect of the news was to create a sense of things impossible of description then and now. A great feeling of oppression weighed down personality and everything around us; the very canebrakes on the borders of the bayous appeared to join in the melancholy of the hour, as it were, to assume a most dismal appearance, while the overhanging moss on the live oaks and magnolias seemed to cast their greenish gray hue and to assume a more sombre shade, and an additional length of natural drapery trailing to the very earth like Nature's veil of mourning for the martyred president.

For the time chaos of thoughts and condition took precedence of military order and duties. To us the whole earth was at a standstill; man looked at man with that silent questioning in which souls talk to each other without the aid of speech. It seemed as if a terrible lightning shaft had struck our camp in front and rear, and in falling had seared us all, intellectually and physically, ev-

eryone unable to speak except in whispers when conversing with each other. Even our appetites were gone—the food remaining untouched upon the mess tables.

But when the news did come proving the first statement to have been true, and the horrible details reached us in full, the colored men of one of the detachments became almost frantic and unmanageable in their despair. Great lamentations in company quarters ensued, during which moans and prayers of the most heartrending pathos followed each other with sincerity of utterance which none could witness unmoved, for these men somehow seemed to think that in the death of Lincoln their freedom was in jeopardy, if not entirely lost. So long as he lived they believed their freedom safe; hence with the positive news of his assassination their hopes of liberty after the war became for the moment clouded, confused and

It was as though there were one dead in every house. The mourners went about the streets uncomforted; men forgot their love for gold and their lust for power; statesmen grouped about like blind men for some hand to lead. The world was in mourning; for all the world knew that he had come to the kingdom for such a time as that. Not only the victors but many of the vanquished who had come up out of a great struggle with their garments drenched with blood to ground their arms at his feet, and who had received his benediction of Peace and Goodwill, were alike mourners when the assassin's bullet did its deadly work; for no one bullet ever went forth on a more gigantic, terribly mistaken mission, or inflicted so crushing a blow to friends and foes alike, as did the leaden missile which silenced forever the generous heart-beating of Abraham Lincoln.

It was no accident that the assassin was caught in the American Flag when he attempted to escape after he had shot the president. It was the vengeance of the flag. The flag was the country's nemesis. That flag kept securely in a glass case, is held sacred in the treasure house of the nation.

He was fortunate in his career while living and fortunate in his sad and tragic death. Hardly in the history of the human race has a ruler died whose loss, seemed to the people so near a personal one. His life was filled to overflowing with sorrow. From the day of his inauguration to the hour of his death was one long night of Gethsemane; closing as it did at a moment when its dramatic unity was complete.

His story is written on the brightest pages of the world's history. It is sanctified in every patriotic household—the stately mansion on the plantation. It is glorified in the God-ordained pure and untrammelled liberty of every man, woman and child on American soil. One hundred millions of people are studying that story, the key to rightening statesmanship, patriotic grandeur, national love and honor.

He approached the Christ Himself more than any other ruler within the knowledge of mankind. What a Moses was he in leading us through the Red Sea of rebellion before he sank to rest under the cruel shot of the assassin! Made in the image of

his God, none but the son of man and his faithful apostle St. Paul had a more delicate mission and performed it more faithfully. Since the master in Israel went about the earth seemingly blasted; for to them President Lincoln was father, brother, friend and liberator.

The feeling of grief and despondency that thrilled the armies of the union from the Atlantic to the Gulf can be attributed to no other sentiment than that of love and veneration for one who had gradually grown near and dear to his soldiers. It was known to all how in the dark days of defeat and loss his eyes grew heavy and his heart sore, depressed with sorrowing for the mothers and wives of those who had gone down to unnamed graves on the battlefield, and the closing words of his last inaugural address held president, army and navy together with bands of gold.

I remember that evening when the news had been confirmed, a downfall of rain came upon us from overshadowing black clouds, as if the very heavens joined with the loyal people of this country in weeping and wailing over the calamity that had befallen the nation on the eve of returning peace. And when Abraham Lincoln died all who were loyal in the nation wept with a sincere sorrow. The silent monitors of grief glistened in every eye. Business, pleasure, trade and commerce stood still to do him reverential homage.

Abraham Lincoln, the house in Washington in which he died, and the scene at his bedside when he was breathing his last.

