

ATTEMPTS UPON LINCOLN'S LIFE

Some Secret History, Heretofore Unpublished, of Attempts to Assassinate President Lincoln in Washington—Told by One of the President's Body Guard.

OMAHA, Special Correspondence, Aug. 6.—That more than one attempt was made to assassinate Abraham Lincoln is a fact known to Mr. John W. Nichols, ex-president of the Omaha fire department. Mr. Nichols was one of the body guard of President Lincoln from the summer of 1862 until 1865. About the middle of August, 1862, Company K, of the 105th Pennsylvania volunteers—in which Mr. Nichols was a private—was detailed as body guard of President Lincoln, and continued in that capacity until his assassination. Some of the body guard were constantly with the president and his family, whether at fashionable levees, receptions to foreign legations, or private interviews, at all of which they were silent spectators of all that transpired. They were always treated with the highest respect by the Lincoln family, who regarded them as part of the household. Every private of the guard received the same attentions of courtesy as the most famous statesman or diplomat at the capital. They all formed a strong personal attachment for the president, and when the grand old man laid down his life in behalf of his country, the members of the body-guard felt as if they had lost the dearest friend they had ever had. During his stay in Washington Mr. Nichols saw and heard many things that have never found their way into public print. The following narrative, related to your correspondent by Mr. Nichols, is strictly true, and the incident is not generally known:

ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION.

"During the first two years of our term of service," said Mr. Nichols, "the most rigid discipline was enforced. Sometimes we would be ordered to use extraordinary vigilance, and to let no one enter the grounds of the White House without the proper passes, and to be very particular as to who approached the president. Often the order would come for the guards on duty to be doubled. It was seldom that we knew the direct cause of these extra precautions, but supposed the officers of the secret service were in possession of information of some plot that boded harm to the president. Up to 1864, owing to our vigilance, Mr. Lincoln escaped the hand of violence. The back of the confederacy was broken, a good feeling pervaded all Washington, and consequently the strict watchfulness that had prevailed grew into laxity. This was the fatal period, for it was at this time that conspiracies were hatched and rebels overran the city comparatively unmolested. The president and his family spent the summer months at the soldiers' home, situated about three miles north of the city, and thither the body guard always accompanied them. It was in the summer of 1864, while we were up at the home, that an incident happened that came very nearly culminating in a tragedy that was more successfully carried out in Ford's theater a few months later. It was the custom of the president to remain late at the war department when anything of great importance was transpiring in the army, consulting with the secretary of war and transmitting and receiving dispatches; and after his work was finished he would ride out to the home. That summer he had persistently refused an escort, imagining himself perfectly secure.

"One night, about the middle of August, I was doing sentinel duty at the large gate through which entrance was had to the grounds of the home. The grounds are

situated about a quarter of a mile off the Bladenburg road, and are reached by devious driveways. About 11 o'clock I heard a rifle-shot in the direction of the city, and shortly afterwards I heard approaching hoof-beats. In two or three minutes a horse came dashing up and I recognized the belated president. The horse was very spirited, and belonged to Mr. Lamont, marshal of the District of Columbia. This horse was Mr. Lincoln's favorite, and when he was in the White House stables he always chose him. As horse and rider approached the gate I noticed that the president was bareheaded. After assisting him in checking his steed the president said to me: 'He came pretty near getting away with me, didn't he? He got the bits in his mouth before I could draw the rein.' I then asked him where his hat was, and he replied that somebody had fired a gun off down at the foot of the hill, and that his horse had become scared and jerked his hat off. I led the animal to the executive cottage, and the president dismounted and entered. Thinking the affair rather strange, a corporal and myself started in the direction of the place where the sound of the rifle report had proceeded, to investigate the occurrence. When we reached the spot where the driveway intersects with the main road, we found the president's hat—a plain silk hat—and upon examining it we discovered

A BULLET HOLE THROUGH THE CROWN.

"The shot had been fired upward, and it was evident that the person who fired the shot had secreted himself close to the roadside. We listened and searched the locality thoroughly, but to no avail. The next day I gave Mr. Lincoln his hat and called his attention to the bullet hole. He rather unconcernedly remarked that it was put there by some foolish gunner and was not intended for him. He said, however, that he wanted the matter kept quiet, and admonished us to say nothing about it. We all felt confident that it was an attempt to kill him, and a well-nigh successful one, too. The affair was kept quiet, in accordance with his request. After that the president never rode alone.

THE KIDNAPING CONSPIRACY.

"The next fall, after we had taken up our winter quarters at the White House, a conspiracy to kidnap the president was unknowingly frustrated by us. Had the truth of the affair leaked out at the time it doubtless would have created great excitement. Our quarters were immediately in front of the south porch of the executive mansion, which position placed us at about equal distance from the treasury, state, war and navy departments. Just to the east of our quarters was our guard tent, where a portion of the body guard remained when on duty. The war and navy departments are situated at the west end of the White House park, and to these buildings Lincoln was called oftener than to any other place in the capital. A gravel walk led from the west end of the mansion through the park, which was filled with ivies and shrubbery, to the war department, and over this the president walked several times a day, often unaccompanied. For reasons, at the time unknown to us. We were ordered to move our guard tent and place it at the west end of the gravel walk, directly in the rear of the war department. While we stayed there nothing occurred to arouse suspicion. Shortly afterward we learned, however, that on the very night after we had moved the tent the rebels had a plan laid to capture the president. The conspirators were to hide in the shrubbery, and when the president should pass along the walk they were to seize, gag and carry

him to the house of one Green, a rank rebel, on the bank of the Potomac, back of the White House grounds, where he was to be secreted for a time, and then spirited across the river into Virginia. Thence he was to be taken to Richmond, or some other Confederate stronghold, where he was to be held as a hostage. The members of the guard always supposed that the conspirators were frightened away when they saw our guard tent, and concluded to abandon the kidnaping enterprise.

ANOTHER PLOT.

Not long after the attempted kidnaping, there occurred another episode, which was thought to have been planned by a band of assassins who made their headquarters in the city. Bourke, the veteran coachman, who had served at the White House through the administrations of Pierce and Buchanan, and thus far through the administration of Lincoln, was taken sick and compelled to be off duty. Immediately a stranger, who represented himself as an experienced coachman from Baltimore, applied at the White House, and reported that Bourke was down in the city on a protracted spree. He pleaded his own cause, and the result was that he was employed as presidential coachman. From the very first he was domineering, and after a few weeks became so important that he was discharged and Bourke reinstated. He made threats, and was so ugly that he was driven away, and we were ordered not to allow him on the premises. One night, shortly after this, just about dusk, the discharged coachman was seen by some of the guard sneaking around the stables, which had been locked for the night. It was not supposed, therefore, that he could do any damage, and, consequently, the guard who saw him did not go to the stables. Presently the whole interior of the stables was discovered to be on fire. The whole guard was called out immediately, and, by dint of great exertion, we saved the president's coach and team, but Tad Lincoln's ponies and Col. Hay's carriage team perished. The plan was to have this man fire the stables, and thus throw us off our guard, and during the excitement some of the conspirators were to rush into the White House and murder the president. But instead of remaining in the house, Mr. Lincoln ran out among us, and thus, in all probability, frustrated another attempt at assassination. What made this make appear more evident is the fact that, after the incendiary was arrested, he produced several witnesses who were employed at Ford's theater, and who testified that Bourke was down in the city during the whole of the evening on which the fire occurred. These were the persons who, in my opinion, laid the final conspiracy that brought Abraham Lincoln to his grave."