

4-11-25

The Pursuit and Capture of Booth

Flight of Lincoln's Assassins Ends at Garrett Home—Fourth Article

By F. L. BLACK

SAFETY at last! What more welcome sight to John Wilkes Booth, the mad avenger of fancied wrongs, than three Confederate soldiers!

They were officers of the Lost Cause returning home from the surrender. At Winchester, Virginia, on April 21, 1865, Colonel John S. Mosby, among the bravest of Confederate officers, had surrendered his command and disbanded his forces. Three of his staff, Captain Willie S. Jett, Major M. B. Ruggles, and Lieutenant A. R. Bainbridge, were making their way homeward three days later, when they arrived at the Port Conway ferry and came face to face with Booth and Herold.

Captain Jett in his testimony at the conspiracy trial said he was on his way to Caroline County, Virginia, in company with Ruggles and Bainbridge when at Port Conway he saw a wagon on the ferry wharf. A young man got out of it and asked to what command they belonged. Ruggles said, "We belong to Mosby's command." The young man then said, "If I am not inquisitive, may I ask where you are going?" Captain Jett replied, "That's a secret."

A man with crutches then got out of the wagon and one of the soldiers asked him to what command he belonged. He replied, "To A. P. Hill's corps." Herold said their name was Boyd; that his "brother" had been wounded below Petersburg, and asked if they would take him out of the lines.

The party then rode up to a house there, and having tied their horses, they all sat down. After they had talked a very short time, Herold touched Captain Jett on the shoulder and said he wanted to speak to him. He went with the captain down to the wharf, and said, "I suppose you are raising a command to go South?" adding that he also would like to go. The captain replied, "I cannot go with any man that I don't know anything about." Herold seemed much agitated, and then said, "We are the assassins of the President." Captain Jett was so much confounded that he did not make any reply. Ruggles was near, and was told the news. Booth then came up, and Herold introduced himself and Booth. It was testified by Captain Jett that Booth had "J. W. B." tattooed on his hand.

When the party crossed the river, Booth rode Ruggles' horse. Herold was walking. Captain Jett rode to Port Royal and asked a woman there if she could take in a wounded Confederate soldier for two or three days. She at first consented; then afterward she said she could not. Booth was finally left at the house of Richard H. Garrett. Bainbridge and Herold went to a Mrs. Clark's, and Ruggles and Jett to Bowling Green. The next day Herold came to Bowling Green, spent the day, had dinner, and left in the evening, and that was the last Captain Jett saw of him, except the night that Booth and Herold were captured when he recognized Herold as the man he had seen with Booth.

Herold said he wanted the officers to help get Booth farther south, but they refused. According to Major Ruggles' narrative in *The Century*, January, 1890, "The ferry (between Ports Conway and Royal) was owned by a man named Rollins, but the scow was run—that is, poled across—by a Negro. The scow was on the other side of the river when we rode up."

In a signed statement addressed, "To the Editor of the *New York Herald*," in 1865, Richard Garrett said: "This man, whom I and all my family looked upon as Mr. Boyd, a wounded Confederate soldier, was taken at once into my house. He supped with my family, and slept that night in one of my upper rooms, in which my sons, John M. and William H., and two smaller children slept. He breakfasted with my family the next morning and remained in the house and yard, most of the time reclining upon the grass in the yard, my little children often being with him. He had very little to say and seemed to be suffering, we thought, from his wound."

"After breakfast that morning my eldest son, John M., rode to a shoemaker's, about one mile from my house, to have his boots repaired, and while there he met a gentleman of the neighborhood who had obtained by private means a newspaper from Richmond (there being no mails to our section), and this paper had in it an advertisement offering a large reward (\$150,000, I think) for the capture of Booth, the murderer of President Lincoln. After my son's return, and while at the dinner table, he spoke of having seen this paper containing the advertisement. This man, who was at the table, re-

marked that he would not have been surprised if half a million dollars had been offered, but that he had heard that the man who committed the act had been arrested between Baltimore and Philadelphia, and was now in Washington. He having before this told me that he was a native of Maryland, I then asked him if he had ever seen the man Booth who was charged with the offense. He said he had seen him once. He saw him in Richmond



Recent views of the Garrett house. The place on the porch indicated by the arrow is where Booth died.

about the time of the John Brown raid. I asked him if he was an old or young man; he said he was rather a young man.

"I had never heard of but one Booth as an actor, and thought it was Edwin Booth. My younger son, who was a mere youth, remarked, 'I wish he could come this way, so that I might catch him and get this reward.' He turned to him and said, 'If he were to come out, would you inform against him?' My son, laughing, said he would like to have the money. The man took all this coolly, and showed nothing like excitement upon the occasion, and caused no grounds of suspicion in any of our minds that he was the man who had done the act. Some two or three hours after dinner, two men on horseback, with a third man riding behind one of them, rode up to my gate on the main road. The man who was riding behind got down and came to my house, while the other two men rode on toward Port

Royal. When this man came to the house the man who was here introduced him to my son, John M., who was in the yard, as Mr. Boyd, his cousin. They walked up the road from my yard, and seemed to be in earnest conversation.

"Very soon after this the two men who had passed on horseback returned, riding very rapidly—one of whom was Lieutenant Ruggles—and said to the men who were here, 'The Yankees are crossing at Port Royal, and you must take care of yourselves the best way you can,' and rode off immediately. I was a short distance from my house, where my laborers were at work, and on coming to the house I saw these two men going off toward the woods. Soon after getting to the house, one of the men, who proved to be Herold, returned to my yard. My son and I said to him we should not be surprised if those forces were in pursuit of him and his friends. He said: 'Oh, no, we have done nothing to make them pursue us'; but that he had heard that some Federal soldiers who were stopping the night before at a place called the Trap, between here and Bowling Green, had had their horses stolen, and he expected these forces were sent down from Fredericksburg to endeavor to capture the thieves. Soon after this the Federal forces passed the road by my house, and went on toward the place at which the horses were said to have been stolen.

"After the forces passed, Herold went to the woods and brought his friend back to the house. They took supper with my family, and, after supper, I, feeling ill, went directly to my room, and my sons and these two men went to my front porch. My son said they seemed to be very uneasy, and that they said they were anxious to get a conveyance to Orange

Courthouse, at which place they heard there were a good many Marylanders who were endeavoring to get west of the Mississippi River, and that they wished to go with them. They asked my son if he knew of any conveyance they could get that evening to go part of the way. He told them there was a colored man living nearby who had a horse and carryall that he hired out at times. They endeavored to get it, but the man was away from home. They then offered my son \$10 to carry them about twenty miles on the way. He told them that he could not go that night, but that if they wished to go next morning he could take them. They proposed sleeping in my house

that night, but my son objected, as he thought from their excited manner there was something wrong about them. They then proposed sleeping under my front porch; but he told them we had bad dogs, and they might be annoyed by them. They then asked if we had not an outhouse in which they could sleep. He told them there was fodder and hay in the tobacco house, and they could go in there if they liked.

"They went in there, and after they did so my two sons, having heard Herold say, 'We should like to get the horses we saw you riding this evening,' and fearing they might get up in the night and take their horses and go off, my sons concluded to take their blankets and go into a cornhouse, between the tobacco house and stable, and guard their horses; and my youngest son, fearing, as these men were heavily armed, that if they attempted to take the horses they might have great difficulty, and might probably get shot, concluded he would take the key to the house and lock the door outside, so as to prevent them coming out if they wished to. This is the reason why the door was found locked when the officers went to the house. About two o'clock a. m., I was awakened by the

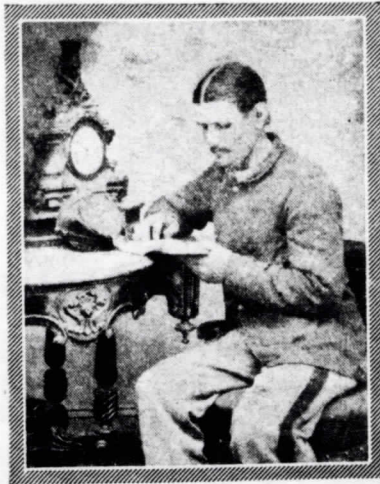
violent barking of my dogs. I arose from my bed and went to the window, and I found the house surrounded by armed forces. I drew on my pantaloons, and, without waiting to put on any other dressing, I opened the door to my end porch, and when I did so three men rushed in and one of them put a pistol to my head and said to me, 'Are there not two men in your house?' I said no; that there were two men here last evening; that they went to the woods when you were passing, and afterward returned and got their supper, and I did not know at that time where they were. I had gone from my supper to my sleeping room, and did not know where they had slept.

"The officer said I was not telling them the truth, and called for a rope and said they would hang me. Being thus rudely treated, I no doubt appeared scared and affrighted. About this time my son, John M., came to the door and said to the officers that these men were in the tobacco house. They put me under guard and carried my son with them to the tobacco house, and made him go in and try to bring the men out. When he went in he addressed Booth as 'Mr. Boyd,' as the officers said, and told him there was a large force surrounding the house, and he had better surrender. He ordered my son out, and appeared to be drawing a pistol, and he ran out. The officer then parleyed with the men inside for some time, when Herold expressed a wish to surrender, and Booth said to the officer that the man in here wishes to come out. The officer told him to hand his arms to one of them, I believe to my son at the door, and to come out. Booth said the man had no arms; they were all his, and they would not be delivered up. Herold then came out, and Booth refusing to surrender, Colonel Conger ordered the house fired to force him out. When he gave these orders Booth said to him, 'Don't destroy the gentleman's property; he is entirely innocent, and does not know who I am.' The house was then fired, after which Sergeant Corbett shot Booth, and he was brought out and died on my porch.

"It was not until after Booth was shot that we were told who he was; we had no idea that they were the murderers of the President. When the forces passed my house they went to Bowling Green and got Jett, the man who brought Booth to my house, and he told them that he left Booth at my house. When he came here I asked him why he brought that man to my house and left him here as a wounded Confederate soldier, and had brought so much trouble upon me. He said he wished to get clear of him, and left him at the first house he came to after leaving Port Royal; that he had told the officers when they came to Bowling Green, that he had left him with me as a Confederate sol-

dier, and that I was not apprised who he was. I told him to make that declaration to an officer in my presence. He made it to Lieutenant Dougherty, who was the officer in command of the regular forces, Colonel Conger being a detective, but in command, I understand, of the expedition.

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Boston Corbett, the sergeant who shot Booth. A photograph by Brady taken soon afterward.

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(Concluded from page 11)

"These are the facts of the case; those in regard to the burning of the barn were learned of my sons, who were present. The subject of the murder of the President having been talked of at church the day before Booth came to my house, I condemned it publicly in unmeasured terms."—RICHARD H. GARRETT.

John W. Garrett, an ex-Confederate soldier and one of the sons of Richard Garrett, testified at the trial of John H. Surratt:

"I saw Booth ride up to our house on Wednesday with Jett and Ruggles—I do not remember the date. Herold came next day in the afternoon. Booth was very lame. He said that he had broken his leg. Booth slept in the house the first night and remained about the house next day. I saw him at dinner. After dinner some Cavalry came along and he and Herold left the house for a short while.

"They came back and after supper he and Herold went to the barn and staid there until the Cavalry came."

What was occurring back in Washington during this spectacular flight? What was the government doing to capture Lincoln's murderers?

Stanton, Secretary of War, on the morning of the fifteenth, had wired Colonel (later General) L. C. Baker, head of the Federal Secret Service: "Come here immediately and see if you can find the murderer of the President." Colonel Baker rushed from New York City accompanied by his cousin, Lieutenant L. B. Baker, also of the Secret Service. Handbills (already described) offering rewards and giving descriptions were issued, and Lieutenant Baker sent into lower Maryland to distribute the bills and look for clues.

At the same time, under the direction of Major-General C. C. Augur, infantry, cavalry, and detectives were dispatched into lower Maryland. Detectives under Lieutenant Alexander Lovett, after calling several times at the home of Dr. Mudd, obtained the story of Booth's and Herold's stay there. Another detective party under Major James R. O'Beirne went down the Potomac to Port Tobacco

on the eighteenth, and meeting Major John M. Waite of the Eighth Illinois Cavalry they decided to explore the Zekiah Swamps, described so graphically by Major O'Beirne: "The swamps tributary to the various branches of the Wicomico River, of which the chief feeder is Allen's Creek, bear various names such as Jordan's Swamp, Atchall's Swamp, and Scrub Swamp. These are dense growths of dogwood, gum, and beech, planted in sluices of water and bog. Frequent deep ponds dot this wilderness place, with here and there a stretch of dry soil, but no human being inhabits the malarious expanse; even a hunted murderer would shrink from hiding there. Serpents and slimy lizards are the only living denizens. Not even the hunted Negro dared to fathom the treacherous clay."

The colored man who had seen Booth and Herold near the Potomac, reported his suspicions to some of Baker's detectives and was brought to headquarters. Baker at once requested a detachment of cavalry, which was sent to him under the command of Lieutenant Edward P. Doherty. Calling in Colonel E. J. Conger and Lieutenant L. B. Baker, of his force, Colonel Baker, according to the story given in his history of the Secret Service, published in 1867, told them that he had information that Booth and Herold had crossed the Potomac at the same time, pointing out with a pencil the place on a map where they had crossed and where he, Baker, believed they would be found. (See Baker's History of the Secret Service, published in 1867.)

The story as told from the reports of Lieutenant Doherty—Official Records Series 1 Vol. 46, Part 1, p. 1317—and the signed statement of Colonel Conger and Lieutenant L. B. Baker sent to Secretary of War Stanton, is that the troop proceeded down the river to Belle Plain where they disembarked about 10 o'clock the evening of April 24 and marched toward the Rappahannock, arriving at Port Conway about 2 p. m., Tuesday afternoon. Questioning the ferryman, Rollins disclosed the fact that Booth and Herold had been there the day before. Pictures of Booth and Herold were shown him which he recognized, but stated that Booth had no mustache. Rollins claimed that Booth offered him \$10 to take them on to Bowling Green, fifteen miles away but that in the meantime three Confederates had come up and that Booth's attention was turned to them.

Rollins said that one of the Confederate officers, Captain Jett, was courting a lady whose father kept a hotel in Bowling Green and that the party had gone in that direction. At six in the evening the expedition was ferried across and moved on to Bowling Green. About midnight Captain Jett was routed out of bed and compelled to lead them to the assassins, twelve miles back to the Garrett place, where they arrived about 2 a. m.

The events at the Garrett barn have already been told by Richard Garrett, the father. They are, however, given more in detail by the officers of the expedition.

Seizing both Garrett boys the officers took them to the barn, compelling one to enter and demand the surrender of the fugitives. Young Garrett went in and, according to the testimony of Colonel Conger given at the conspiracy trial, came out very soon and said:

"This man says, 'Damn you, you have betrayed me,' and threatened to shoot me."

"I said to him, 'How do you know he was going to shoot you?'"

"Said he, 'He reached down to the hay behind him to get his revolver, and I came out.'"

"I then directed Lieutenant Baker to tell them that if they would come out and deliver themselves up, very well; if not, in five minutes we would set the barn on fire.

"Booth replied: 'Who are you; what do you want; whom do you want?'"

"Lieutenant Baker said, 'We want you, and we know who you are; give up your arms and come out.'"

"I say Booth; for I presumed it was he. He replied, 'Let us have a little time to consider it.'"

"Lieutenant Baker said, 'Very well'; and some ten or fifteen minutes probably intervened between that time and anything further being said.

"He asked again, 'Who are you, and what do you want?'"

"I said to Lieutenant Baker, 'Do not by any remark made to him allow him to know who we are; you need not tell him who we are. If he thinks we are rebels, or thinks we are his friends, we will take advantage of it; we will not lie to him about it, but we need not answer



Ruins of Garrett's barn and outhouse near Port Royal, where Booth was shot.

From Harper's Weekly, May 20, 1865.

any questions that have any reference to that subject, but simply insist on his coming out, if he will.' The reply was made to him, 'It doesn't make any difference who we are; we know who you are, and we want you; we want to take you prisoners.'

"Said he, 'This is a hard case; it may be I am to be taken by friends.'

"Some time in the conversation he said, 'Captain, I know you to be a brave man, and I believe you to be honorable; I am a cripple. I have got but one leg; if you will withdraw your men in line one hundred yards from the door, I will come out and fight you.' Lieutenant Baker replied that we did not come there to fight; we simply came there to make him a prisoner; we did not want any fight with him.

"Once more after this he said, 'If you'll take your men fifty yards from the door, I'll come out and fight you; give me a chance for my life.' The same reply was made to him.

"His answer to that was, in a singular theatrical voice, 'Well, my brave boys, prepare a stretcher for me.'

"In the meantime, I requested one of the Garretts to pile some brush up against the corner of the barn—pine boughs. He put some up there, and after awhile came to me and said, 'This man inside says that if I put any more brush in there he will put a ball through me.' 'Very well,' said I, 'you need not go there again.' After a while Booth said, 'There's a man in here wants to come out.' Lieutenant Baker said, 'Very well; let him hand his arms out, and come out.' Some considerable talk passed in the barn; some of it was heard, some not. One of the expressions made use of by Booth to Herold, who was in the barn, was, 'You damned coward, will you leave me now? Go, go; I would not have you stay with me.' Some conversation ensued between them. . . . It was not heard; we could simply hear them talking.

"He came to the door and said, 'Let me out.' Lieutenant Baker said to him, 'Hand out your arms.' The reply was, 'I have none.' He said, 'You carried a carbine, and you must hand it out.' Booth replied, 'The arms are mine, and I have got them.' Lieutenant Baker said, 'This man carried a carbine, and he must hand it out.' Booth said, 'Upon the word and honor of a gentleman, he has no arms; the arms are mine, and I have got them.' I stood by the side of the Lieutenant and said to him, 'Never mind the arms; if we can get one of the men out, let us do it, and wait no longer.' The door was opened, he stuck out his hands; Lieutenant Baker took hold of him, brought him out, and passed him to the rear. I went around to the corner of the barn, pulled some hay out, twisted up a little of it, about six inches long, set fire to it, and stuck it back through on top of the hay. It was loose, broken-up hay, that had been trodden upon the barn floor. It was very light and blazed very rapidly—lit right up at once.

"I put my eye up to the crack next to the one the fire was put through, and looked in, and I heard something drop on the floor, which I supposed to be Booth's crutch. He turned around toward me. When I first got a glimpse of him, he stood with his back partly to me, turning toward the front door. He came back within five feet of the corner of the barn. The only thing I noticed he had in his hands when he came was a carbine

He came back, and looked along the cracks, one after another, rapidly. He could not see anything. He looked at the fire, and from the expression of his face, I am satisfied he looked to see if he could put it out, and was satisfied that he could not do it; it was burning so much. He dropped his arm, relaxed his muscles, turned around, and started for the door at the front of the barn. I ran around to the other side, and when about half round I heard the report of a pistol.

"I went right to the door, and went into the barn and found Lieutenant Baker looking at Booth, holding him or raising him up, I do not know which. I said to him, 'He shot himself?' Said he, 'No, he did not either.' Said I, 'Whereabouts is he shot—in the head or neck?' I raised him then, and looked on the right side of the neck, and saw a place where the blood was running out. I said, 'Yes, sir, he shot himself.' Lieutenant Baker replied very earnestly that he did not. I then said, 'Let us carry him out of here; this will soon be burning.' We took him up and carried him out on the grass, underneath the locust trees, a little way from the door. I went back into the barn immediately to see if the fire could be put down, and tried somewhat myself to put it out, but I could not; it was burning so fast and there was

no water and nothing to help with. I then went back. Before this, I supposed him to be dead. He had all the appearance of a dead man; but when I got back to him, his eyes and mouth were moving. I called immediately for some water, and put it on his face and he somewhat revived and attempted to speak. I put my ear down close to his mouth and he made several efforts to speak, and finally I understood him to say, 'Tell mother I die for my country.' I said to him, 'Is that what you say?' repeating it to him. He said, 'Yes.'

"They carried him from there to the porch of Mr. Garrett's house and laid him on an old straw bed, or tick or something. By that time he revived considerably; he could then talk in a whisper, so as to be intelligently understood; he could not speak above a whisper. He wanted water; we gave it to him. He

wanted to be turned on his face. I said to him, 'You cannot lie on your face,' and he wanted to be turned on his side; we turned him upon his side three times, I think, but he could not lie with any comfort, and wanted to be turned immediately back. He asked me to put my hand on his throat, and press down, which I did, and he said, 'Harder.' I pressed down as hard as I thought necessary, and he made very strong exertions to cough but was unable to do so—no muscular exertion could he make. I supposed he thought something was in his throat, and I said to him, 'Open your mouth and put out your tongue, and I will see if it bleeds.' Which he did. I said to him, 'There is no blood in your throat; it has not gone through any part of it there.' He repeated two or three times, 'Kill me, kill me.' The reply was made to him, 'We don't want to kill you; we want you to get well.'

"I then took what things were in his pockets, and tied them up in a piece of paper. He was not then quite dead. He would—once, perhaps, in five minutes—gasps; his heart would almost die out, and then it would commence again, and by a few rapid beats would make a slight motion. I left the body and the prisoner Herold in charge of Lieutenant Baker. I told him to wait an hour if Booth was not dead; if he recovered, to wait there and send over to Belle Plain for a surgeon from one of the gun-ships; and, if he died in the space of an hour, to get the best conveyance he could and bring him on.

"I stayed there some ten minutes after that was said, when the doctor there said he was dead."

(A knife, pair of pistols, belt, holster, file, pocket compass, spur, pipe, carbine, cartridges, and bills of exchange were shown to the witness and identified by him.)

The bill of exchange was on the Ontario Bank, Montreal branch, for £61 12s 10d, made payable to John Wilkes Booth.

The orders had been to take Booth alive, if possible, and Sergeant Boston Corbett of the Cavalry Detachment, who shot him, when reprimanded explained in his testimony that, "I saw him (Booth) make a movement toward the door. I supposed he was going to fight his way out. One of the men, who was watching him, told me that he aimed the carbine at me. He was taking aim with the carbine, but at whom I could not say. My mind was upon him attentively to see that he did no harm, and when I became impressed that it was time I shot him. I took steady aim on my arm, and shot him through a large crack in the barn."

After making certain Booth was dead they sewed him up in a saddle blanket. An old Negro living in the vicinity had a horse. To this was harnessed a ramshackle wagon. The corpse was tied with ropes around the legs and made fast to the wagon. In this rickety vehicle the body of John Wilkes Booth journeyed back again to the Potomac River.

Herold and the body were loaded on the steamer *Ide*, carried to Washington and placed for safe-keeping on a gunboat.

About 1872 John St. Helen asserted that he was John Wilkes Booth. His story will be discussed in the next installment.