

Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War



PATRIOTIC RECOLLECTIONS



Another Lincoln Boy

By George Ruehle [\(a\)](#)

Company C, 27th Michigan Volunteer Infantry

[George Ruehle of Monterey, Michigan relates it was late in April 1864 that General Burnside, on his march from Annapolis, Maryland to the Rapidan passed through the city of Washington, D.C.]

As we moved down the Avenue to the Long Bridge, we passed the corner of 14th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue and the kindly loving face with sorrowful eyes of Father Abraham (as we lovingly called him) looked down on us from the review stand. It was the first time I ever saw President Lincoln. The next time I saw the President was about six weeks later. Wounded three times at Petersburg, Virginia, I was being taken (with others) from the 6th Ward Hospital, in an ambulance, to Harwood Hospital. On our way up the Avenue, we passed a group of notables, four in number, President Lincoln, Horace Greely, Governor Morton of Indiana and Governor Blair of Michigan. President Lincoln gave us a smiling, friendly greeting and there were 28 happy Michigan boys in that ambulance. Two days later President Lincoln visited Harwood Hospital and tried to make us all happy by his kindly fatherly greeting.

In February, 1865, having recovered from my wounds, I was transferred from Chester, Pennsylvania Hospital to Company "C" or Company K.V.R.C. Veterans Reserve Corps, 24th Regiment stationed at Washington, D.C. One of my first duties with my new Company and Regiment was on Pennsylvania Avenue March 4, 1865 on the occasion of Lincoln's second inauguration. It was a sad sorrowful face that we looked on, but the same kindly Father Abraham. In the next few weeks it was my good fortune to see President Lincoln several times. On the evening of April 13, 1865 on the occasion of the grand celebration, I stood in front of the White House and listened to the "Great Emancipator" as he thanked God and congratulated the people on the happy and successful termination of the war. The next night, April 14, 1865, "Great God" what a night, the very city of Washington's foundation rocked. Our beloved Father Abraham was shot to death by the hand of a miserable assassin. In the company of a comrade, I was at Fords theatre on that fatal night and noticed the President in his box, but being tired and sleepy we left for our quarters up 7th Street about ten minutes before the fatal shot was fired. Within half an hour after the tragedy, our Regiment was on guard at the White House and Secretary of War, Seward's house.

My Company guarded the remains of Lincoln the last night in Washington in the Capitol. First

Sergeant of our Company, James Bourdan, was one of 24 First Sergeants who formed the guard of honor with Lincoln's body to Springfield, Illinois. My bunkie and I had just returned from Fords Theater to our Quarters in Wisewell Barracks and had barely got into our bunks when Captain Sutherland hurriedly entered our quarters and called Sergeant Bourdan to form our Company on the parade ground immediately. Fletcher and I were just doing our "and now I lay me down to sleep" with only our boots and hats removed. It did not take us long to be ready for business and all military frills were dropped at once. It was just simply shoulder arms, form ranks, right face, forward march and on the run the Company swung into the battalion and down 7th Street. On every street crossing a guard of four mounted cavalymen had already been placed and in all directions the only sound that disturbed the quite of the night was moving military. When we reached Pennsylvania Avenue Company "H" was sent to the Long Bridge where Company "I" had previously been stationed. The right four Companies were sent to the White House and the left four to Secretary Seward's house. Secretary Seward had been seriously stabbed by the assassin Payne and two of Seward's sons and two attendants were also stabbed before Payne was overpowered and arrested. All roads and paths leading from the city were immediately put under guard.

Long Bridge and Chain Bridge were also closely guarded. The banks of the Potomac were patrolled by cavalry, and long boats from a war ship anchored in the river were patrolling up and down the river. Mounted patrols were scouring the Maryland and Virginia country for Booth and Herrold. For the next 24 hours citizens could not pass the next four corners without a pass signed by General Auger, or Provost Marshall, General Frey. Altogether it was a terrible night, surcharged with tragedy, treason and murder. Everybody looked upon everybody else with distrust and suspicion, and many people both civic and military did not hesitate to say they believed that the Vice President was mixed up in the affair, but subsequent events proved that no one connected with government affairs, civic or military had any knowledge of the conspiracy or in its enactments--and I will say right here that in none of the engagements, from the wilderness to Petersburg, did I feel so nervous and shaky as I did on this eventful night.

The main conspirators, with the exception of Booth and Herrold and young Surrat, were soon rounded up and lodged in the old U.S. Arsenal. Large numbers of suspects were arrested and locked up in the old Capitol prison but as nothing could be proven against these people they were soon released from custody. During all this time the hunt for Booth was going on in earnest. Hardly a day passed that rumor did not have Booth in hiding in the city somewhere. On one of these occasions, I was acting Sergeant of the Guard at the old Central Guard House (Military Prison) when a hurried order by Provost Marshal Frey requested me to take 25 men of our guard and report at a shady reputation of a hotel where we searched the hotel from basement to attic, but no Booth did we find. Meantime, Secretary Stanton telephoned to New York for Col. L.G. Baker, (a secret service officer--a Michigan man) and his cousin, S.B. Baker (late of the Auditor General's office in Lansing) also a Government Detective and put in their hands the job of going after Booth, with orders to bring him back dead or alive. Three days had elapsed since the time that Booth had escaped and Col. Baker took up the search. Through a negro, Baker soon learned that Booth and Herrold had crossed the river near Chappel Point in a skiff. With 25 men of the 16th Cavalry of New York in the command of Captain Doherty, guided by Lieutenant Col. E.J. Conger (brother of O.D. Conger of Port Huron), Col. Baker set out in quest of Booth. While these events were transpiring a Military court was convened at the old arsenal and the conspirators were tried for the parts they played in the great crime. During the time that intervened between the assassination and Vice President Johnson taking the oath of office as President of the United States, Secretary Stanton managed the Ship-of-State and he was an able Captain; woe betide the assassin or traitor that fell in his hands. On April 20, 1865 Secretary Stanton offered a reward of \$50,000 for the apprehension of the murders of Lincoln, this stipulated his being taken dead or alive. Col. Baker and Secretary Stanton's course was a wise one. Just eleven days from the time the President was shot, Booth and Herrold were captured in a barn on the Garrett farm, near Port Royal on the Rappahannock River. Herrold surrendered and Booth, in a crippled condition, was shot by Sergeant Burton Corbett, who was severely censured for shooting Booth, but J. Wilkes Booth was a desperate man and would certainly have used the carbine that he

was armed with in doing harm to some of Baker's men, if he had not been shot. Sargeant Corbett should have been better rewarded for so cheaply disposing of the assassin.

Col. Baker immediately brought the remains of Booth and his prisoner to Washington. Herrold was placed in confinement in the old arsenal with the rest of the conspirators. The remains of Booth was put on board the Monitor, Montank where postmortem examination was held. So far as I know on the night of April 27, 1865, was placed in charge of a detail of two men with orders to bury Booth in a corner of the old arsenal grounds. I have surely with my own eyes seen something that looked like a new made grave in that same corner. The fact that the Monitor convoys anchored in the river that night and weighed anchor, steamed down the river and returned next morning, gave some color to the rumor that the body of Booth was dumped in the Chesapeak Bay.

To some extent the conspiracy involved about 25 people of the number captured and tried were David Herrold, G. Alzaro, Louis Payne, Edward Spangler, Michael O. Laughlin, Samuel Arnold, Mrs. Suratt, Dr. Samuel Mudd, and John Suratt (Mrs. Suratt's son). During the incarceration of the prisoners in the old arsenal, the government exercised great precaution to prevent deliverance of the prisoners. Wilcox's Division of the old 9th Corps. was kept in bivouac day and night just east of the arsenal on the Potomac Flats. A strong guard was kept on the outer wall with an inner guard one to each cell. It was a dark gloomy place, where God's light and sunshine never penetrated. During the trial, each prisoner was changed to a different cell each day and each guard was posted at a different cell every time on duty. I had a disagreeable job, or pleasure of being on 48 hour detail on inside guard duty. Also, 48 hour detail as guard on the outer wall.

Mrs. Suratt had the appearance of being a cultured and refined woman, but the other prisoners looked like just what they were, villains. Alzerott and Payne gave one the shivers to look at them. In accordance with the court sentence, Herrold, Alzerott, Payne and Mrs. Suratt were hanged and buried in the arsenal grounds. Later the bodies of Booth and those buried in the old arsenal, were supposed to have been delivered to their respective families. Spangler, Loughlin Arnold and Dr. Mudd were sentenced to long terms on dry Tortu Island. While there an epidemic of yellow fever broke out and for heroic services rendered, on that occasion Dr. Mudd was pardoned. (Dr. Mudd was the doctor who set Booth's leg when it was broken as he jumped from the stage after killing President Lincoln). John Suratt, son of Mrs. Suratt

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(a) After an unsuccessful attempt at age 15, George Ruehle (pronounced -Reely) finally enlisted at age 16, on December 4, 1862, in Company C of the 27th Michigan Volunteer Infantry in St. Clair County. After he was wounded three times at Petersburg, he was transferred to the Veterans Reserve and discharged on July 26, 1865. He came back to Michigan and homesteaded a piece of property in Monterey of Allegan County.

Submitted by:

Cleon Duryea (Great Grandson of George Ruehle)

Treasurer, General John A. Logan Camp #1

Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War

Grand Rapids, Michigan

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