

# INTELLIGENCE in the CIVIL WAR





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## Introduction

Though much has been written about the Civil War itself, little has been written about the spy war that went on within.

The chronicling of Civil War intelligence activities challenges historians because of the lack of records, the lack of access to records, and the questionable truth of other records. Judah P. Benjamin, the Confederacy's Secretary of State, burned all the intelligence records he could find as federal troops entered Richmond. Union intelligence records were kept sealed in the National Archives until 1953. A few individuals involved in intelligence gathering burned their personal papers while others chose to publish their memoirs, though greatly embellishing their exploits. Even today, the identities of many spies remain secret. Henry Thomas Harrison, for example, was a Confederate spy whose intelligence set in motion the events that produced the battle of Gettysburg. But neither his first name nor details of his long career as a spy were known until 1986, when historian James O. Hall published an article about him.

Though the idea of centralized intelligence gathering was decades away, the age-old resistance to the idea was present even then. Neither side saw the need to create such intelligence organizations, but each side approached the idea of effectively acquiring intelligence in their own way. The Confederacy's Signal Corps, devoted primarily to communications and intercepts, included a covert agency, the Secret Service Bureau. This unit ran espionage and counter-espionage operations in the North. Late in the war, the bureau set up a secret headquarters in Canada and sent out operatives on covert missions in Northern states. The Union's Bureau of Military Information, unlike the Confederacy's Secret Service Bureau, operated for specific generals rather than for the Union Army itself. But here was born the idea of what would eventually become a centralized military intelligence division.

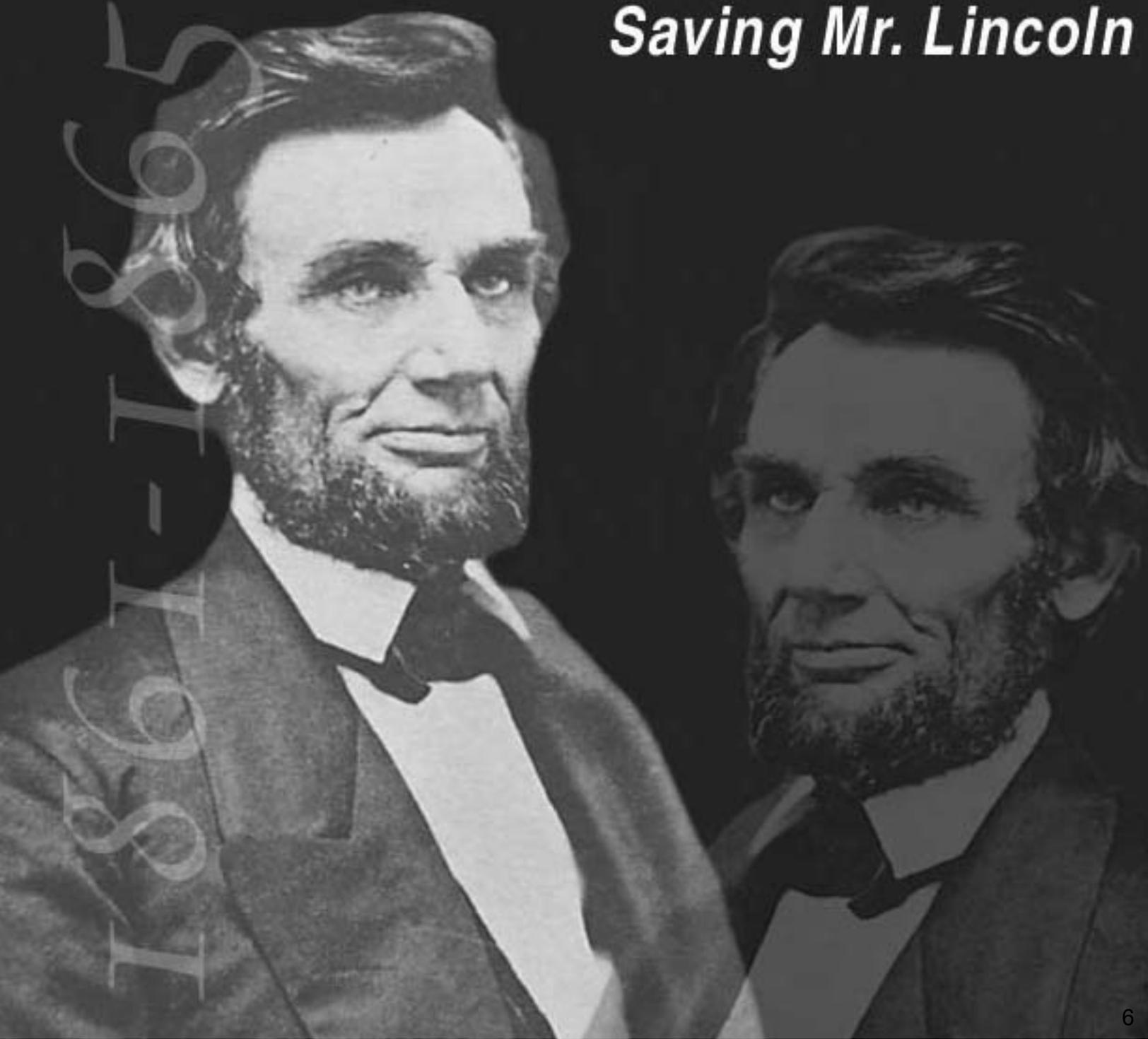
Each side still used age-old intelligence techniques, such as code-breaking, deception, and covert surveillance. However, into this modern war came two innovations that would endure as tools of espionage: wire-tapping and overhead reconnaissance.

What follows is a look at some of the highlights of how the North and the South gathered and used their information, the important missions, and the personalities. From this special view, the focus is not on the battlefield, but on a battle of wits.

## **The Civil War**

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*Saving Mr. Lincoln*



## Saving Mr. Lincoln

On February 11, 1861, Abraham Lincoln said his farewell to the people of his hometown of Springfield, Illinois, and boarded a train that would take him to Washington for his inauguration on March 4. As he started out, rumors of assassination plots circulated in several cities along the planned route. In Washington, stories spread that assassins would strike down Lincoln before or during his inauguration.

The South Carolina legislature had responded to Lincoln's election by unanimously voting to secede from the Union, leading the march of Southern states toward secession. "Civil war," said an Ohio newspaper, "is as certain to follow secession as darkness to follow the going down of the sun." The Union was tearing apart—and so, it seemed, was the nation's capital itself.

Rumors of plots swirled around the city. Secessionist congressmen were said to be planning to kidnap lame-duck President James Buchanan so that Vice President (and future Confederate general) John C. Breckinridge, who had run against Lincoln as a pro-slavery candidate, could seize power. "Minutemen" from Virginia and Maryland were reportedly ready to invade the city.

Charles Pomeroy Stone, a West Point graduate who had served in the Mexican War, was in Washington when the secessions began. Concerned about the rumors, he called upon his old commander, now Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, commander-in-chief of the U.S. Army. Scott made Stone a colonel and named him inspector-general of the District of Columbia militia.

Most of the U.S. Army was in Indian country, far beyond the reach of railroads. Washington's potential defenders included volunteer units of dubious loyalty. These included the National Rifles, whose captain said his men stood ready to "guard the frontier of Maryland and help to keep the Yankees from coming down to coerce the South."

Like many other Army officers of the time, Stone had to grope for military intelligence, using whatever resources he managed to find. There was no formal military intel-

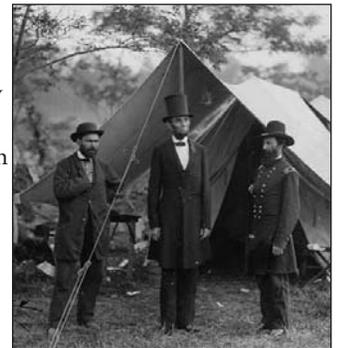
ligence organization, and counterintelligence was an unknown art. Stone realized that he needed help from civilians with special skills: detectives.

The U.S. government, lacking any federal investigative agency, often used private detectives to track down counterfeiters and mail thieves. Suspecting that the National Rifles harbored secessionists, Stone planted a detective in the ranks and told him to keep the unit's captain under surveillance.

Stone's detective told him that the men of the National Rifles were planning to storm the Treasury building as part of a plot to take over Washington. Stone also learned that more than 300 other men, known as "National Volunteers," were drilling in a hall above a large livery stable. Stone gave the task of penetrating that group to a "skillful New York detective" who had been loaned to the Army.

Through the detective's undercover work, Stone was able to learn enough to force the disbanding of the National Volunteers. Their captain, Dr. Cornelius Boyle, a prominent Washington physician, left the capital and later became a Confederate intelligence officer. Stone's counterintelligence efforts also purged the National Rifles of secessionists. The unit became one of 30 companies formed by Washingtonians loyal to the Union and ready to defend both the capital and Lincoln.

Soon after Lincoln's train left Springfield, Stone began receiving reports of assassination plots. "So many clear indications pointed to Baltimore that three good detectives of the New York police force were constantly employed there," Stone recalled. In a classic example of intelligence analysis, he compared the detectives' reports to "the information received from independent sources." Stone did not mention another detective—Allan Pinkerton, founder of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency.



*Major Allan Pinkerton, President Abraham Lincoln, and Gen. John A. McClernand at Antietam, MD, October 1862*

Samuel Morse Felton, president of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad, had hired Pinkerton after hearing reports that rabid secessionists in Baltimore were planning to cut Baltimore off from Washington by burning bridges and sinking the Susquehanna River train ferry. Pinkerton went to Baltimore with five operatives, including a trusted assistant, Kate Warne, described by Pinkerton as America's first woman detective. Pinkerton set up an office and posed as a stockbroker named John H. Hutchinson.

While investigating the sabotage rumors, Pinkerton heard of a plot to kill Lincoln in Baltimore when his train arrived from Harrisburg on February 23. Lincoln was to be taken by carriage to a private home for lunch and then returned to the train. While secessionists—the National Volunteers were mentioned—whipped up a riot, a barber who called himself Captain Ferrandini would kill Lincoln, vanish into the mob, and slip away to the South. Baltimore police would have only a small force at the scene, under orders from the mayor and chief of police, both Southern sympathizers.

Pinkerton hoped to foil the plot by getting Lincoln to change his schedule. On February 21, he met with Lincoln in a Chicago hotel room. Lincoln said he could not believe there was a conspiracy to kill him. Hours later, Frederick Seward, son of Senator William Henry Seward, arrived at Lincoln's room and warned him of the plot, which had been discovered independently by detectives working for Colonel Stone and General Scott. They had sent young Seward to Lincoln, who now was convinced.

Next morning, Lincoln left by train for Harrisburg, as scheduled, then boarded a special train, accompanied by his bodyguard Ward H. Lamon, a burly former law partner. When the train pulled into West Philadelphia, Pinkerton was waiting in a carriage. The telegraph to Baltimore was cut off. Agents were placed in telegraph offices in Harrisburg, Philadelphia, and New York City, where there was a special watch to hold up any messages about Lincoln's travels. The carriage took Lincoln and Lamon to the yard of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad. There, Kate Warne met the carriage with four tickets for sleeping berths. She and Pinkerton, like Lamon, were armed.

The train pulled out shortly before 11 p.m. and arrived in Baltimore about 3:30 a.m. on February 23. Warne remained in Baltimore as the sleeping cars with Lincoln on board were shifted to another train, which arrived in Washington around 6 a.m. Later, Lincoln would say he regretted slipping into the capital "like a thief in the night."

On March 4, the morning of the inauguration, Stone stationed riflemen in windows overlooking the broad steps where Lincoln would take the oath of office. Sharpshooters stood on roofs along the inaugural route to the Capitol as Lincoln rode past in an open carriage. Soldiers lined the streets. Under the platform where Lincoln stood, other soldiers huddled, guarding against bomb planters. Other troops formed a cordon at the foot of the steps. After Lincoln's inauguration, Stone continued to protect the capital, taking control of telegraph offices and the railroad station, and seizing boats on the Potomac to keep Confederate agents from using them.

On April 12, Confederate cannons in Charleston began firing on Fort Sumter. The Civil War had begun.



*Fort Sumter*

Nine days later, Pinkerton wrote to President Lincoln, offering to start "obtaining information on the movements of the traitors, or safely conveying your letters or dispatches." Before Lincoln responded, Major General George B. McClellan asked Pinkerton to set up a military intelligence service for McClellan's command, the Army's Division of the Ohio. A former

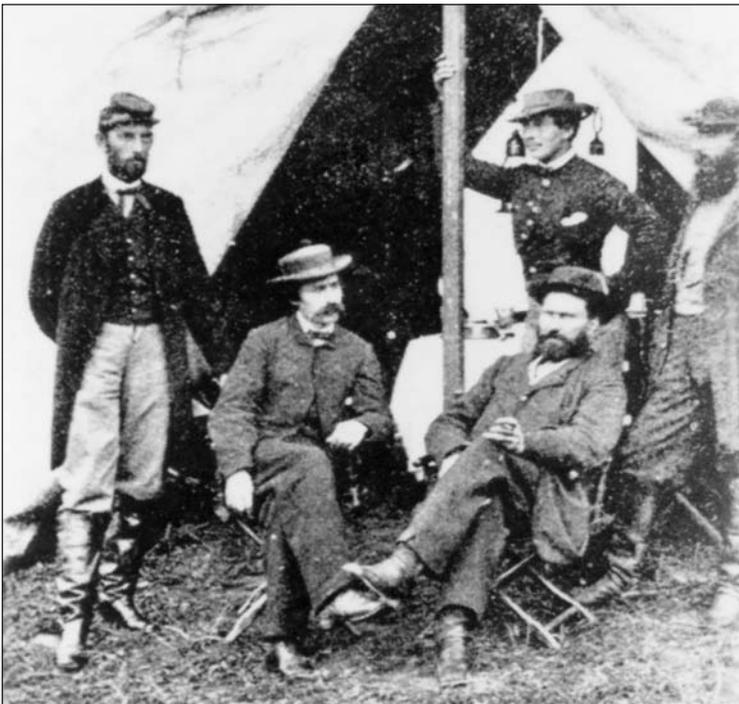


*Gen. George McClellan*

railroad executive, McClellan was Pinkerton's friend and former client. Pinkerton agreed and, with several operatives, headed for McClellan's headquarters in Cincinnati. Like the detectives who had worked for Colonel Stone, Pinkerton would be a civilian, but he assumed a military cover name, Major E. J. Allen.

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## The Eye That Never Sleeps



*Major Allan Pinkerton (right, seated) with his officers*

Allan Pinkerton, born in 1819 in Glasgow, Scotland, was the son of a police sergeant. At the age of 23, he emigrated to the United States. After working for a time as a cooper, he became first a deputy sheriff in Illinois and then a member of Chicago's newly organized police force.

In 1850, he left the force as a detective and founded the Pinkerton National Detective Agency. Pinkerton's code called for his agents to have no "addiction to drink, smoking, card playing, low dives or ... slang." On the front of his Chicago headquarters, he placed a sign with a huge eye bearing the company slogan—"We Never Sleep." That Pinkerton logo was probably the origin of the term "private eye."

Pinkerton's detectives specialized in tracking and capturing gangs that robbed railroads. Through his work, Pinkerton met George B. McClellan, president of the Rock Island and Illinois Central Railroad, and its attorney, Abraham Lincoln. Those connections led to his work during the Civil War.

After the war, Pinkerton returned to Chicago and basked in the publicity earned by Pinkerton detectives as they pursued such notorious bandits as the James brothers and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. "Pinkertons," as they were called, also worked as strikebreakers for the executives of companies battling unions that were organizing rail workers and coal miners.

Pinkerton died in 1884 and was buried in a family plot whose graves included that of Timothy Webster, one of his best agents who was hanged by the Confederates. Pinkerton had recovered Webster's remains after the war.

The Pinkerton National Detective Agency continued as a family enterprise through four generations. Outsiders bought it and kept the Pinkerton name. In 1999, Securitas, an international security firm, acquired the Pinkerton company.

# Intelligence Collection—The South



*Edmond Goode Flag*



*Flag of the 21st North Carolina Infantry*



*Flag of the 5th South Carolina Infantry, Co. G, "Catawba Light Infantry," Reverse*



*Flag of the 4th Virginia Infantry*



*Flag images courtesy of  
The Museum of the Confederacy,  
Richmond, Virginia*



*Jefferson Davis' Memorial Service flag,*

## Intelligence Collection—The South

For Confederates planning espionage against the North, Washington looked like an ideal site: a city 60 miles south of the Mason-Dixon Line, adjacent to slave-holding states, and full of Southern sympathizers. Many of them were in Congress or in the federal bureaucracy, and had access to valuable intelligence. All recruiters had to do was find among them the men and women who would have the courage and the skill to act as reliable agents.

The earliest known recruiter was Governor John Letcher of Virginia, who laid the foundation for Confederate espionage work in Washington. Virginia seceded from the Union on April 17, 1861, but did not join the Confederacy until May. During the interval, Letcher saw his state as an independent foe of the Union and began his own defense by forming an army and setting up a spy net in his foe's capital. He knew Washington well: as a member of Congress from 1853 to 1859 and he had been active in the city's social life.

One of the best-known members of that society was Rose O'Neal Greenhow, a vivacious 44-year-old widow, who partied and dined with Washington's elite. Openly pro-South, she had wept in the Senate Gallery on January 21, 1861, when Jefferson Davis, one of her many influential friends, said farewell to the Senate and went off to lead the Confederacy.

Letcher got his spy nest started by telling Thomas Jordan, a Virginia-born West Point graduate, to recruit Greenhow. Jordan, who had served in the Seminole Indian War and the Mexican War, was stationed in Washington. Sometime in the spring of 1861, while still a U.S. Army officer, he called on Greenhow and asked her to be an agent. (He soon left Washington and became a lieutenant colonel in the Virginia Provisional Army.)

Greenhow accepted the mission enthusiastically, using her knowledge of Washington's ways to get intelligence useful for the South. Major William E. Doster, the provost marshal who provided security for Washington, later called her "formidable," an agent with "masterly

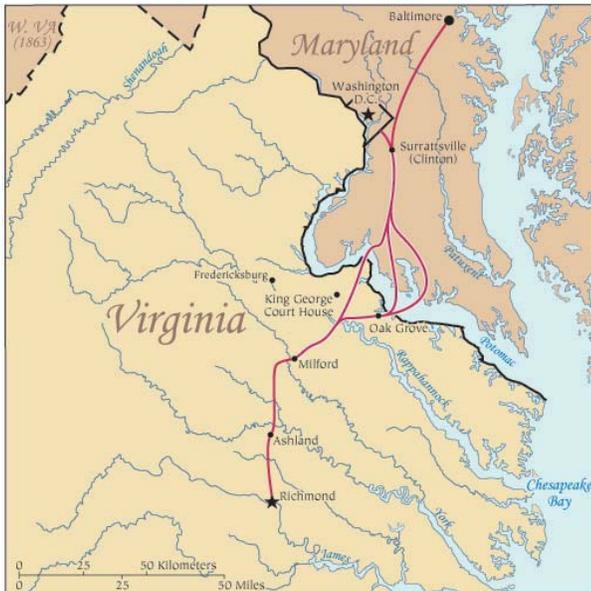
skill," who bestowed on the Confederacy "her knowledge of all the forces which reigned at the Capitol."

Greenhow's support of secessionists did not turn away her anti-slavery admirers, who included Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs (and future vice president to President Ulysses S. Grant). Wilson was identified as the author of love letters signed H; one letter said that "spies are put upon me but I will try to elude them tonight and once more have a happy hour in spite of fate." Another gentleman caller was a member of Wilson's committee, Senator Joseph Lane of Oregon, who signed his importuning letters to her. Another friend, Colonel Erasmus D. Keyes, General Winfield Scott's military secretary, later said that she had "tried to persuade me not to take part in the war."

Jordan instructed Greenhow in a simple, 26-symbol cipher and told her to use his cover name, Thomas John Rayford, for sending him reports. In her memoir about her espionage, she said that she sometimes used a word code. As an example, she told of a letter that said, "Tell Aunt Sally that I have some old shoes for the children, and I wish her to send one down town to take them, and to let me know whether she has found any charitable person to help her take care of them." What the letter actually meant was: "I have some important information to send across the river, and wish a messenger immediately. Have you any means of getting reliable information?"

The delivery of the ciphered reports to Jordan involved an ever-changing "Secret Line," the name for the system used to get letters, intelligence reports, and other documents across the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers and into the hands of Confederate officers and officials. For Greenhow, the Secret Line began with a courier to whom she would entrust her reports. He or she would then hand these off to the next link in the chain of men and women who slipped in and out of taverns, farms, and waterfront docks along routes that connected Baltimore and Washington to the Confederacy.

One of Greenhow's reports, she later said, had helped the South win the first major battle of the war at Bull Run Creek on the road to Manassas, Virginia, on July 21, 1861.



*The Confederate "Secret Line."*

Modern historians discount her role, attributing the Confederate victory to tactics and errors that produced a Union rout. But P.G.T. Beauregard, the victorious general, gallantly gave her credit for alerting him to the size of the federal force advancing toward Manassas. He said that an enciphered report from her had been delivered to a Confederate picket outpost and quickly passed on to him and on to Jefferson Davis—with an added request for reinforcements.

The carrier of the report was Betty Duvall, a young friend of Greenhow. Duvall, dressed in a farm woman's clothes and driving a cart, passed through the Union sentinels on the Chain Bridge across the Potomac in Washington, and stopped at a Virginia safe house, where she mounted a horse and rode to the outpost, near Fairfax County Courthouse. She told the officer in charge that she had an urgent message for Beauregard. "Upon my announcing that I would have it faithfully forwarded at once," the officer later said, "she took out her tucking comb and let fall the longest and most beautiful roll of hair I have ever seen. She took then from the back of her head, where it had been safely tied, a small package, not larger than a silver dollar, sewed up in silk." Within was the message for Beauregard.

On the advance toward Manassas, the Union troops had overrun the Fairfax outpost and found papers and maps that incriminated Greenhow. Her grand home, not far from the White House, was put under surveillance by Allan Pinkerton, who had been placed in command of the Union Army's Division of the Potomac after the debacle at Bull Run. "I secured a house in Washington," Pinkerton later wrote, "and gathered around me a number of resolute, trustworthy men and discreet women."

Pinkerton's first major assignment was the capture of Rose Greenhow. One rainy night, wanting to peek into her parlor, he went to a high window, removed his boots, and stood on the shoulders of two operatives, "prepared to take notes of what transpired." A man had entered—and Pinkerton recognized him as an officer assigned to the provost marshal's office.

"Just at that moment I again received a warning from my supporters, and hastily jumping to the ground, we hid ourselves until the pedestrians had passed out of sight and hearing." He climbed back on the men's shoulders and saw the officer show Greenhow a map. The two left the room for more than an hour, returned "arm in arm," and, with "a whispered good-night and something that sounded very much like a kiss," the officer left.

Pinkerton followed the officer to a building he did not recognize. Suddenly, four soldiers with fixed bayonets grabbed Pinkerton—and arrested him on the officer's order. Pinkerton was soon released and the captain



*Rose O'Neal Greenhow and her daughter during her time at the Old Capitol Prison.*

arrested. The captain, his career ruined, died sometime later, reportedly a suicide.

A week later, Pinkerton arrested Greenhow at her home and seized documents and personal letters that linked her to Senators Wilson and Lane, along with many other well-known Washingtonians. She

was charged with “being a spy in the interest of the rebels and furnishing the insurgent generals with important information relative to the movements of the Union forces.” For ten months, she and several female friends were held in her home. Because she kept attempting to smuggle out messages, she was put in the Old Capitol Prison (now the site of the United States Supreme Court Building). She was released in June 1862 and sent through federal and Confederate lines to Richmond. After Greenhow’s capture, the cipher that Jordan had devised apparently was used for deceptive messages sent by Union officers. Writing about the cipher to Confederate Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin, Jordan said, “Being my first attempt, and hastily devised, it may be deciphered by any expert, as I found after use of it for a time.”

The Confederates operated at least two other intelligence networks in Washington, both run by cavalrymen and probably set up by the Secret Service Bureau, a clandestine unit within the Confederacy’s Signal Corps. The bureau, a part of the Confederate War Department in Richmond, was commanded by Major William Norris, a former Baltimore lawyer. The Signal Corps ran the army’s semaphore service while the Secret Service Bureau oversaw a communications network whose missions included the running of agents to and from Union territory and the forwarding of messages from Confederate officials in Richmond to contacts in Canada and Europe.

One of the bureau’s most important tasks was the obtaining of open-source material, especially newspapers, from the North, primarily through sympathizers in Maryland, including postmasters. The newspapers provided information—and, occasionally, agents’ messages hidden in personal columns.

The delivery system—sometimes called “our Government route”—boldly relied on the U.S. mail along part of the way. One “mail agent,” a Marylander who lived near Washington, regularly drove his cart there, collected South-bound documents from network members, then hid the mail in manure that he picked up for his garden. Typically, an agent in Union territory wrote a letter, probably in cipher, addressed it to a specific person, such as “Secretary of War, Richmond, Va.,” and placed it in an envelope, which was then sealed and placed inside a second envelope. A U.S. stamp was put

on that envelope, which was addressed to a collaborator, usually in Maryland. He or she would then continue the letter on its way by handing it to the first of a relay of mail agents for delivery to “signal camps” in Virginia.

Confederate mail supervisors established several accommodation addresses (as they would be called today) so that a suspiciously large amount of mail did not get delivered to one recipient. The system depended mostly on volunteers, some of whom made the enterprise profitable by adding smuggling to their espionage.

There were also riverside farms where Southern sympathizers maintained simple signal systems. One of the signalers was 24-year-old Mary Watson, who hung a black dress or shawl from a dormer window to warn boatmen across the river that Union troops were near.

Union officers assigned to investigating the rebel special-delivery operation occasionally made arrests of mail agents, but the mail kept going through. Major General William T. Sherman was particularly incensed by the regular delivery of northern newspapers. Newspaper correspondents, he fumed, “should be treated as spies...and are worth a hundred thousand men to the enemy.” Yet, like other commanders on both sides, he planted false information in newspapers, well knowing that the enemy would read and perhaps believe the deception.

Although the focus of Confederate espionage was initial-



*John S. Mosby*

ly on Washington, as the war went on, intelligence gathering became more tactical. Distinctions blurred between “spies” and “scouts.” But an age-old custom prevailed: if you were caught in your army’s uniform, you were a prisoner of war; if you were in disguise, you were a spy and could be hanged. Men who rode with the “Gray Ghost,” John S. Mosby, and other such military

units were usually considered soldiers. Many other riders, particularly a Confederate espionage group known as Coleman's Scouts, were treated as spies.

When Yankee troops captured a group of riders behind Union lines in Tennessee, they singled out one young man who had documents concealed under his saddle and in his clothing. Besides information about federal defenses in Nashville, the man, Sam Davis, had a piece of paper signed E. Coleman.

Union interrogators, seeking information on the notorious Coleman's Scouts, focused their attention on Davis. He knew that "Coleman" was the cover name of Captain H. B. Shaw, who had also been captured and was being held in a nearby cell. But when Brigadier General Grenville M. Dodge, a Union intelligence officer, demanded to know who and where Coleman was, Davis refused to talk. He remained silent even when Dodge threatened to hang him.

Davis, a 21-year-old infantryman, was a courier for Shaw. When he was hanged on November 27, 1863, he went into Confederate legend not as a courier, but as a spy. The legend has him say, "I would sooner die a thousand deaths than betray a friend or be false to duty." He

became "the South's Nathan Hale," one of many captives executed as spies by both sides. The number of suspected spies executed by both sides is not known because of the lack of records and the secrecy that surrounded most executions.

Because "spies" and "scouts" were used interchangeably, it is difficult to sort out "espionage," which is the work of spies, from "reconnaissance," which is the work of trained observers, such as cavalry scouts. Confederate General Robert E. Lee, for example, received a steady stream of intelligence from what would be called agents or spies today. In a report to Confederacy President Jefferson Davis, Lee said that "our scouts on the Potomac" had learned that a Union army was about to march because "three days' rations had been cooked and placed in the haversacks of the men." Another so-called Southern scout seemed more likely to be a spy because he "was able to converse with" Union troops to get an accurate estimate of the size of a deployment.

Lee's greatest scout, Major General Jeb Stuart, won public fame as a dashing cavalryman leading audacious raids behind Union lines. But when he was killed in action in 1864, Lee gave him an epitaph worthy of a great spy: "He never brought me a piece of false information."

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## The Flamboyant Spy

James Ewell Brown Stuart, better known as Jeb Stuart, was the grandson of a Revolutionary War hero and son of an Army officer who served in the War of 1812. Jeb Stuart was born in the family homestead in Patrick County, Virginia, on February 6, 1833. After attending Emory and Henry College, he entered the U.S. Military Academy, graduating in 1854. Three years later, as a cavalry officer in the West, he was wounded in an Indian battle.

While on duty in the Kansas Territory, Stuart pursued an abolitionist known as Ossawatimie Brown, who was accused of illegally freeing slaves. On October 17, 1859, Stuart and Brown would cross paths again. Stuart accompanied Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lee, who led a U.S. Marine force to Harpers Ferry to fight raiders who had seized the federal arsenal and rifle factory there. John Brown, who called himself Isaac Smith, had barricaded himself and his followers in the armory fire engine house. Lee sent Stuart to the door with a white flag. The man known as Smith “opened the door about four inches, and placed his body against the crack, with a carbine in his hand,” Stuart later wrote. “Hence his remark after his capture that he could have wiped me out like a mosquito. When Smith first came to the door, I recognized old Ossawatimie Brown who had given us so much trouble in Kansas.” Later, Stuart searched Brown’s lodgings and found documents that disclosed details of Brown’s plans for leading a slave revolt. This was Stuart’s first venture into the gathering of intelligence.

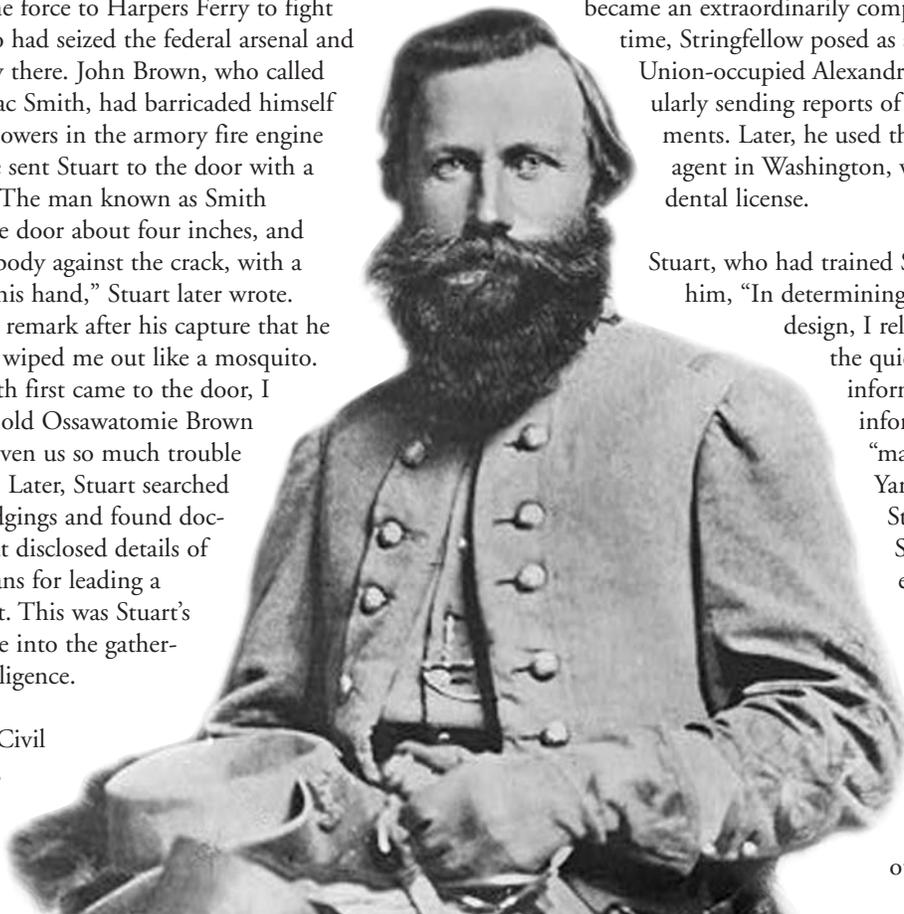
When the Civil War began, Stuart

resigned his U.S. Army commission and joined the Confederacy. He rose rapidly, becoming a brigadier general in 1861 and in 1862, as a major general, chief of cavalry of the Army of Northern Virginia. He seemed too flamboyant to be a spy. “He could wear, without exciting a suspicion of unfitness, all the warlike adornments of an old-time cavalier,” a biographer wrote of Stuart. “His black plume, and hat caught up with a golden star, seemed the proper frame for a knightly face....” At a time when scout and spy were often used interchangeably, Stuart’s military exploits eclipsed his espionage at least in public. But Stuart’s espionage was well-known by General Robert E. Lee, who took a personal interest in the covert work of Stuart’s scouts. One of them, Lee wrote, “sometimes acted under my special direction.”

One of Stuart’s scouts, Benjamin Franklin Stringfellow, became an extraordinarily competent agent. For a time, Stringfellow posed as a dentist’s assistant in Union-occupied Alexandria, Virginia, while regularly sending reports of Union troop movements. Later, he used the same cover while an agent in Washington, where he even got a dental license.

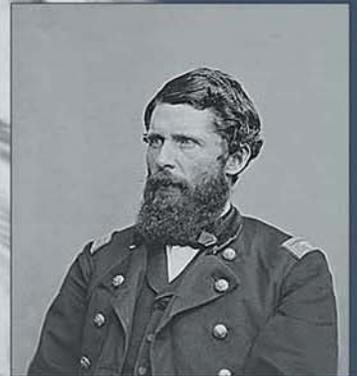
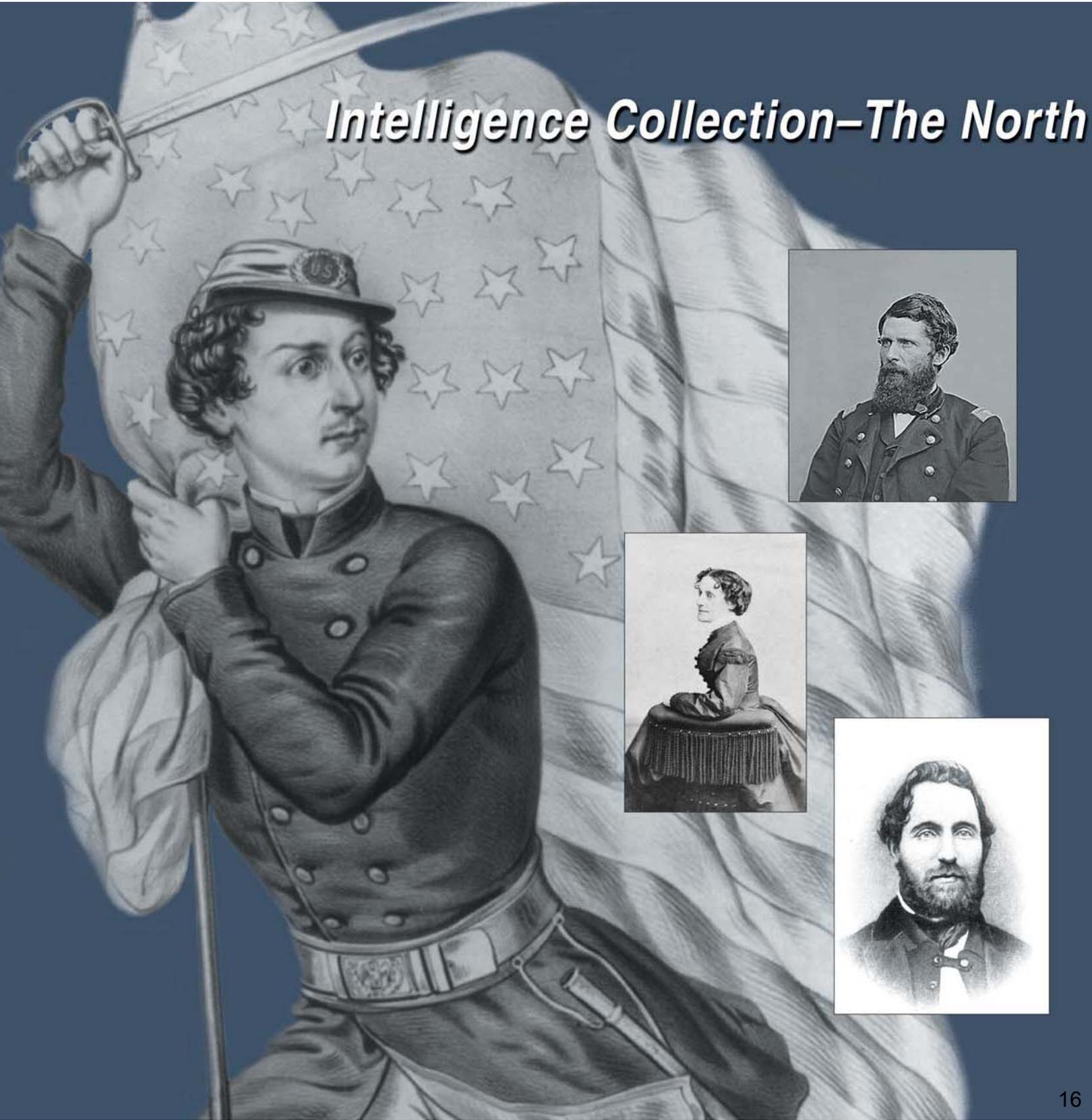
Stuart, who had trained Stringfellow, said of him, “In determining the enemy’s real design, I rely upon you, as well as the quick transmission of the information.” Stringfellow’s information, Stuart said, “may be worth all the Yankee trains” that Stuart attacked.

Stuart’s colorful career ended on May 11, 1864, when he was fatally wounded while defending Richmond. When Lee learned of Stuart’s death, he said, “I can scarcely think of him without weeping.”

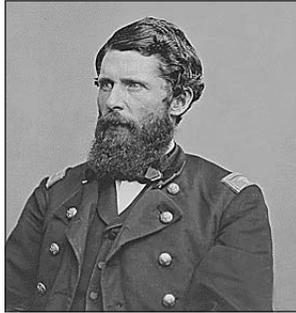


Jeb Stuart

# *Intelligence Collection—The North*



## Intelligence Collection—The North



Lafayette Baker

While the Confederacy focused on getting intelligence to Richmond via the couriers of the Secret Line, the Union did not have any similar system. Union generals handled intelligence gathering as a task for their own commands. Early in the war, for example, when Major General George B. McClellan became commander of the Union's Army of the Potomac,

Allan Pinkerton moved to Washington to gather intelligence for McClellan. Pinkerton worked for McClellan, not the entire Union Army. Even so, Pinkerton later called himself "Chief of the United States Secret Service." A similar claim came after the war from Lafayette C. Baker, who performed counterintelligence and oversaw security for Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, commander-in-chief of the U.S. Army.

There was no centrally directed intelligence agency in Washington. Pinkerton and Baker worked only for their superiors. They ran their organizations so independently and so competitively that, in at least two cases, the operatives of one "secret service" arrested or kept under surveillance the operatives of the other.

The Union never developed a need for a national intelligence agency. The gathering of intelligence was, in fact, so decentralized that President Lincoln himself even hired an agent on his own, paid him, and personally received the agent's reports.

William A. Lloyd, a publisher of railroad and steamer guides for railroads and steamers in the South, approached Lincoln early in the war, looking for a pass through Confederate lines so that he could continue his business. Lincoln had a better idea: "Use the pass to go to the South and spy for me"—at \$200 a month plus expenses. (This would have the equivalent purchasing power of about \$4,000 today.)

Lloyd signed a contract in which he agreed to provide Lincoln personally with such intelligence as the number

and location of Confederate troops and the layouts of their forts and fortifications.

Lloyd headed into the Confederacy with his wife and maid, along with a publishing company employee, Thomas H. S. Boyd.

Because Lloyd had contracted to send his information directly to Lincoln, he did not use Union Army communications. Instead, he mailed the intelligence in letters to Boyd's family. Then a member of the family would take the letters to the White House with instructions to have them delivered directly to Lincoln, who presumably used the information to weigh against what he was getting from his generals.

Lloyd's arrangement with Lincoln resembled Pinkerton's with McClellan and Baker's with Scott: each agent was serving a man, not an agency. Pinkerton added to his services by doing some political spying for McClellan while contributing little useful intelligence.

In July 1861, with some 35,000 Union troops in Washington and Northern patriots clamoring for an "On to Richmond" campaign, Scott desperately needed whatever information he could get about Confederate strength around Manassas Junction, Virginia. In that hamlet, 25 miles from Washington, near a creek called Bull Run, Scott would launch the war's first major battle. Scott sent Baker to Manassas Junction.

According to Baker's memoir, he set forth to Manassas under the cover of a traveling photographer named Samuel Munson of Knoxville, Tennessee. Arrested in Manassas by the Confederates, he was questioned and sent on to Richmond, where, he claimed, Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, questioned him, but could not break Baker's cover. Although he spent time in a Richmond jail and was under guard before being released, he said he had somehow managed to get enough information about Confederate forces to please Scott.

The information did not prevent a Union rout at Bull Run. The debacle ended Scott's career and began Baker's, for he became chief of what he sometimes called the National Detective Police. With about 30 employees and an appointment as "special provost marshal for the War Department," Baker worked not only on spy cases but also tracked down deserters and subversives, an all-inclusive label for Southerners suspected of treasonable acts,

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