

# WHY EVERYTHING YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT THE LINCOLN ASSASSINATION IS WRONG: PART II

BY DAVE MCGOWAN | FEB 9, 2014

I know what you must be thinking here: “How the hell could you leave Francis Tumblety out of the previous post? Compared to him, guys like Boston Corbett, Henry Rathbone and Edwin Stanton seem perfectly sane. And whose name was in the news in a weirder way in the years following the assassination than the esteemed Dr. Francis Tumblety? And in addition, doesn’t he deserve honorable mention for the ridiculous facial hair alone?”

I can’t really argue much with any of that. I think it was probably a subconscious omission so that I would have something really good to start this post with. Because as stories go, the Francis Tumblety story is pretty damn good. And seriously strange. But before getting to that, I must also quickly add Father Wiget to the list. Not much can be dug up on him other than that he was assigned as Mary Surrat’s spiritual adviser during the brief period that she sat in her cell waiting to be executed, and he died shortly thereafter.

Moving on now to the man of the hour, Francis Tumblety was arrested on May 5, 1865, on suspicion of being complicit in the plot to assassinate Abraham Lincoln. Tumblety was an associate of – and by some reports a sometime employer of – executed conspirator David Herold. His arrest was ordered by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. To be fair to Tumblety though, it should be noted that he was only one of some 2,000 people who were arrested as possible conspirators. That’s how things work in a democracy, you see – falsely imprison first, ask questions later.



*The esteemed Dr. Francis Tumblety*

In any event, Tumblety was held for nearly a month before being released on May 30, 1865. Prior to his arrest, he had lived a very colorful life. Born circa 1833 and raised in New York, Tumblety was widely viewed as a charlatan and a kook. While still a minor, he reportedly peddled pornographic materials. He soon transformed into a quack "Indian herb doctor" who was run out of various parts of the country for running cons. In one reported case, he was directly involved in the death of a 'patient,' though he suffered no repercussions for his actions. According to one account, he kept a collection of human uteruses on display in his Washington, DC home.

Some twenty-three years after his arrest in Washington, Tumblety took up lodging in, of all places, a boardinghouse in London's Whitechapel district. He was identified at that time, and has been identified by various researchers since that time, as being a prime suspect in the still unsolved Jack the Ripper murders. Following an arrest on November 7, 1888 for "gross indecency," Tumblety fled the country on November 20 under an assumed name and quickly made his way back to the US, where he died some five years later. What are the odds, one wonders, that the very same guy would be suspected of involvement in two such completely different and seemingly unconnected crimes? Two crimes separated by a vast ocean and the passage of nearly two-and-a-half decades? Probably about the same odds that a guy like [John Phillips would have connections to both the Black Dahlia murder and the Manson bloodbath.](#)

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Pictured below is the single-shot derringer that, according to the legend we all know so well, John Wilkes Booth used to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln. One of the most iconic pieces of historical memorabilia that this country has to offer, it has been displayed for decades, viewed by millions, and written about by thousands. But after the passage of 149 years, it doesn't appear that anyone has ever thought to question why Booth, an intelligent and educated man by all accounts, would choose such a ridiculous weapon to take with him on his mission.



Let's imagine that it is the evening of April 14, 1865, and you are John Wilkes Booth. Your mission is to assassinate the president. In a crowded theater. In the middle of Washington, which, at the time, is heavily fortified and militarized. Because there is, you know, a war going on. And the enemy's base of operations – in Richmond, Virginia – is only 100 miles away. So the nation's

capital is crawling with armed military personnel, armed police patrols, and armed thugs in the employ of Baker and Stanton. Your mission then is not going to be an easy one. The president is under armed guard, or at least he's supposed to be. He's also supposed to be in the company of General Ulysses S. Grant, who is known to always be armed. Of course, Grant has fortuitously opted to get the hell out of Dodge just hours before he was to have accompanied the Lincolns to the theater, but you shouldn't have any way of knowing that, just as you shouldn't have any way of knowing that Parker will desert his post. And there will be no shortage of other armed personnel in Ford's Theater, including Army Captain Theodore McGowan (no relation), who is seated very near the door to Lincoln's box seats.

So you have to assume that you're going to have to get past at least two armed attendants, and probably more, to get to the president. And you're going to have to do that without firing a shot, since you only have one and you will need to save that for Abe. And since the only realistic chance you have of actually killing Lincoln with your wildly inaccurate weapon is by sneaking up behind him and delivering a contact wound to his head, you're going to have to get past any guards without making any noise. And since Grant is supposedly also on the hit list, you're going to have to kill him as well, which I guess you'll have to do by bludgeoning him with your empty gun. That should work out pretty well.



*Ford's Theater, circa 1865*

You're not on a suicide mission, by the way, so even if you somehow manage to successfully assassinate the president, and presumably General Grant as well, you're still going to have some major problems on your hands. First of all, you're going to have to make your escape from a theater full of people, many of them armed.

Because in April 1865, the beginning of the era that will be mythologized as the 'Wild West' days, there are guns everywhere and everyone is packing heat. And you, of course, will have blown your wad and will be unarmed.

If you somehow manage to make your way out of the theater, then you will face the daunting prospect of making your way out of the city and across the Potomac. And as I may have mentioned, DC is swarming with armed soldiers, armed spies and armed police, as well as armed citizens. And your only means of defending yourself will be with a dagger, which probably isn't going to be very effective. Your goal is to reach the Navy Yard Bridge, which will get you across the Potomac and to relative safety. But even if you reach it,

you've still got a big hurdle to overcome: the bridge has a strict curfew and the armed guard is under standing orders not to allow anyone to cross without explicit authorization. If you attempt to cross without anyway, you will be shot. A gun might come in handy, but you won't have one.



*The Navy Yard Bridge, John Wilkes Booth's passage out of town*  
To recap then, you have set a very ambitious goal for yourself. You must first get to the president, who is sitting in a private box in a crowded theater with at least two armed attendants. You must then kill the president with a single shot, because your weapon doesn't allow for second chances, and also somehow kill General Grant. You must then, in an unarmed state, make an escape first from the

theater and then from the city, and you must get past an armed guard at the bridge. And you have to do all of that with just one bullet. It's hard to see how anything could go wrong with such a brilliant plan.

Of course, it doesn't have to be this way. There are other weapons available. Weapons better suited to your mission. And as an alleged Southern operative, you should surely know that. It was, after all, Confederate guerilla groups that pioneered the shock-and-awe tactic of using overwhelming force in the form of multiple revolvers. We've all seen images of Wild West gunslingers riding hard with their reins in their teeth, six-shooters blazing in both hands. It's only natural to dismiss such images as a hackneyed Hollywood creation. But strangely enough, it's actually not. Rebel groups like Mosby's Rangers and Quantrill's Raiders really did train to do exactly that. And they wore custom-made holsters that could hold as many as six revolvers, three on each side. That allowed them to get off as many as 36 shots before their overwhelmed Union adversaries, armed with muskets, could reload and get off so much as a second shot.

Those semi-mythical figures in American history that we know as Frank and Jesse James, and Jim, Bob, John and Cole Younger, and Bill, Grat, Bob and Emmett Dalton, learned the skills they later employed as Wild West 'outlaws' while riding with the likes of William Quantrill and "Bloody Bill" Anderson. But that's not really the point here – the point here is that revolvers are easy to come by and might serve you better than a nearly-worthless single-shot derringer. And according to the official story, you definitely have access to at least two of them (pictured below).



There are other things you might want to consider as well, such as not committing the crime as John Wilkes Booth. You are, after all, a famous stage actor, which means that you are also a wardrobe and makeup guy. Because in your era, you and your contemporaries have to handle those duties yourselves, so you travel with a couple large trunks full of stuff like wigs and fake beards. You could easily don a convincing disguise so as not to be easily recognized. Then you don't have to worry about getting out of the city alive; all you have to do is make it out of the theater, quickly ditch the disguise, and then you can circle around and rejoin the crowd at Ford's without arousing any suspicion at all.

And you do, after all, have a lot at stake. Even if you manage to make an escape from DC, your lifestyle and career will be distant memories. All the fame, all the female adoration, all the success, all

the wealth ... it will all be gone if you commit the crime as John Wilkes Booth. So you might want to put on a disguise. And replace that derringer with a revolver or two. And maybe bring an accomplice or two along for additional firepower. You have quite a few co-conspirators to choose from.

You also might want to reconsider whether Ford's Theater is the best place to do this. According to numerous historians, Lincoln has a bad habit of ignoring advice from aides and strolling around Washington unescorted at times, leaving him seriously vulnerable. That might make it a bit easier to successfully pull this off.



FANNY BROWN  
(‘Pretty Fay Brown’)

*Fanny Brown, one of Booth’s many paramours*

In summary then, your best bet is probably to make the attempt on Lincoln’s life when he is alone and unprotected. And you should probably bring along some more impressive firepower, just in case. If you are determined to do it in the theater, you should don a disguise and bring along a couple other gunmen in case one or more of you are killed or physically prevented from reaching the

president. The dumbest thing you could probably do would be to go it alone, as John Wilkes Booth, and arm yourself only with a derringer. But I guess you can't argue with success ... right?

Meanwhile, one of your comrades-in-arms, Lewis

Paine/Payne/Powell, has a difficult task ahead of him as well. His goal is to kill Lincoln's Secretary of State, William Seward, who is recuperating at his stately manor in the heart of DC after being severely injured in a fall from a horse-drawn carriage just nine days earlier. Seward had suffered a broken lower jaw, a fractured right arm, torn ligaments in his foot, and heavy bruising over much of his body.

The 63-year-old secretary is therefore physically vulnerable, but assassinating him is still not going to be easy. For starters, Paine is going to have to gain access to the estate. Then he's going to have to find Seward without knowing the layout of the home or which floor or which of the many rooms the secretary is in. And he's going to have to get past a lot of people, because there are no less than eight other able-bodied adults in the home, five of them men, two of whom are military personnel. And there are readily accessible weapons in the home. And, as I may have mentioned, there are armed patrols all over the city, and they are quite capable of quickly responding to any signs of a disturbance at the Secretary of State's residence.



*The rear view of Ford's Theater and 'Baptist Alley'*

The attack on Seward has been all but written out of our history books, but in 1865 it was portrayed as an integral component of the

plot against Lincoln, particularly during the show trial of the alleged conspirators. It is now mentioned only in passing, if at all. Which is probably because the story doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

In the home are: William Seward, the injured Secretary of State; William Bell, Seward's black servant; Frederick Seward, William's son as well as his Assistant Secretary of State; Major Augustus Seward, another son and a career Army officer (who will be promoted in a few weeks to lieutenant colonel); Private George Robinson, Seward's personal attendant (who will be promoted to sergeant in a few weeks); Emerick Hansell, a US State Department courier; Frances Seward, the secretary's wife (who will be dead very soon); Fanny Seward, his daughter (who will be dead fairly soon); and, finally, the wife of one of the Seward sons.

Payne of course is going it alone, just like Booth, for reasons that have apparently never required an explanation. The five able-bodied men in the house, at least a couple of whom are likely armed, will pose a physical challenge. The three women will pose less of a physical threat, but one or more of them are very likely to run out into the street to summon any nearby patrols. And just the fact that there are so many people in the way will make it extremely difficult for Powell to control the situation.



*Another of*

*Booth's paramours, this one unidentified*

Paine's mission is not unlike Booth's; he must enter the building, work his way past any resistance to get to his target, take out his target, work his way back out of the building past any resistance, and then somehow find his way out of Washington. But unlike Booth, Payne won't have even a single bullet to work with. Instead,

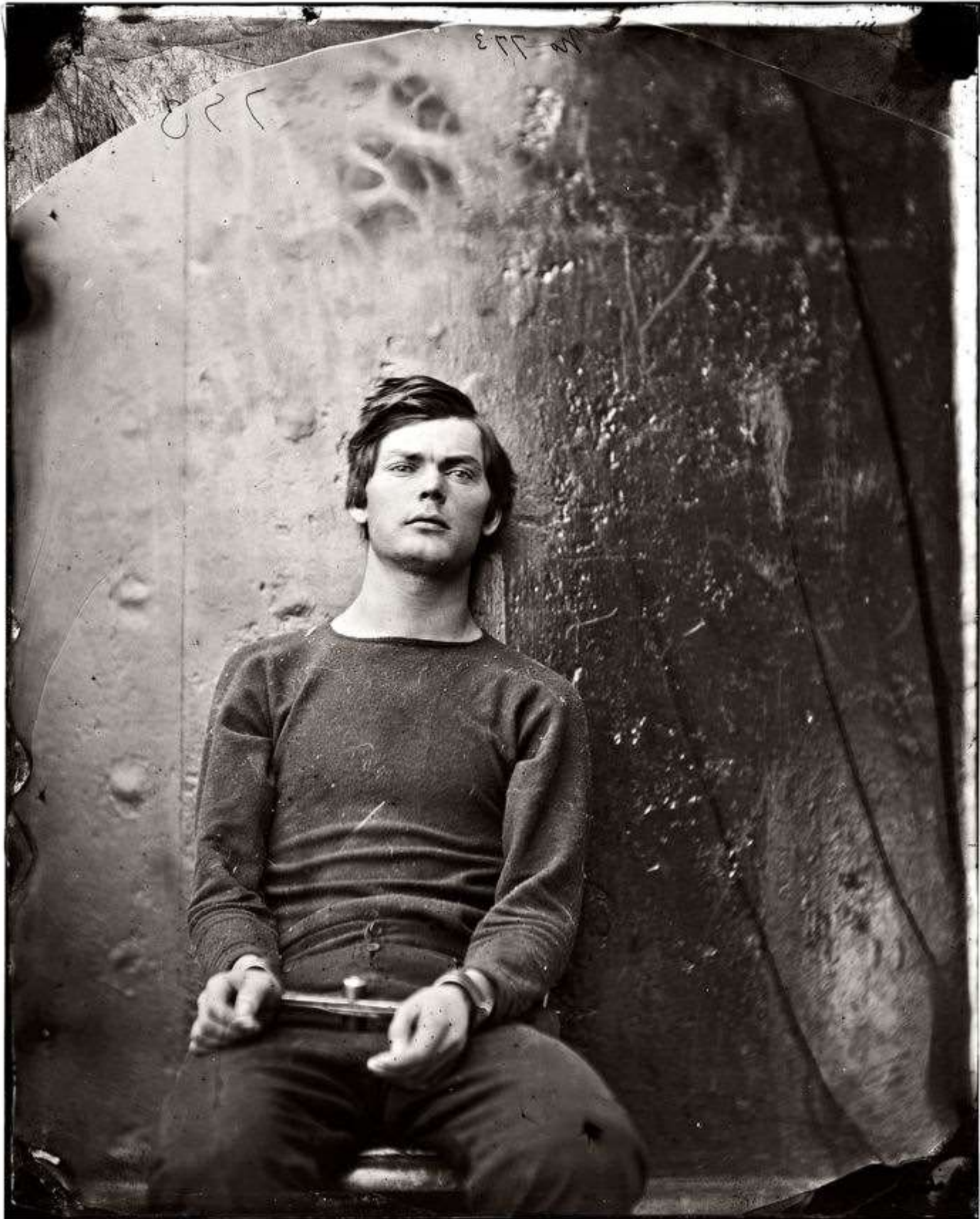
he is going in armed only with a bludgeon and a knife. And he'll be coming out with nothing but the clothes on his back.

Technically speaking, he will be carrying a gun, but it doesn't work and so is only useful as a bludgeon. In a city overflowing with guns, Paine has chosen to bring one that doesn't work. Which means that, luckily for the Swards, no one is going to die.

Paine though is going to leave quite a trail of destruction once he enters the estate, which sits just a half-dozen blocks from Ford's Theater. Frederick Seward will be left gravely injured, with his head reportedly split open and his skull fractured in two places. Major Augustus Seward will also receive severe head injuries, with one report claiming that he was half scalped. Private Robinson will also be seriously wounded, with deep stab wounds to his chest. Emerick Hansell will receive at least one deep, very serious chest wound as well. Fanny Seward will be wounded as well, in some unspecified manner. And William Seward – who is lying in bed on his back, unable to defend himself – will be brutally stabbed about the head and neck, but will, despite his already weakened condition, miraculously survive.

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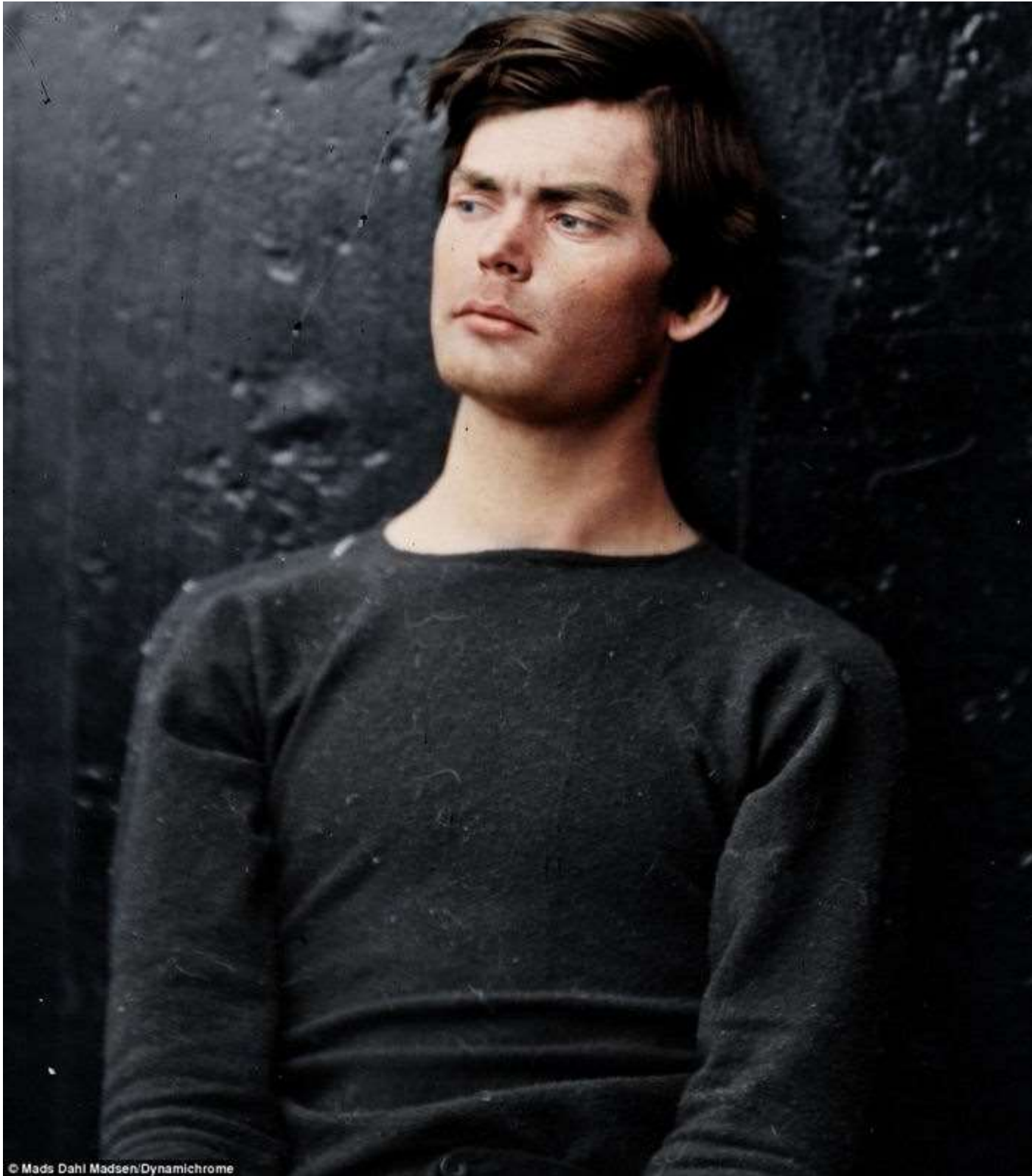
It is difficult to believe that the attack on Secretary of State Seward ever took place at all. Lewis Paine supposedly gravely wounded six people in hand-to-hand combat, four of them able-bodied men, and yet, as photos taken soon after his arrest just days later reveal, he didn't have so much as a scratch on him. He supposedly left his hat, gun and knife behind, creating a handy evidence trail, but why would he leave his only weapons behind? He also allegedly left a bloodstained coat with gloves and a fake moustache in the pocket in the woods just outside of DC. Lewis Paine was apparently a very considerate attempted assassin.



*Lewis Paine, April 1865*

The descriptions of the conditions of the victims came from the first three people to conveniently arrive at the crime scene: Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, and Surgeon General Joseph Barnes. You know, just your typical first responders. None of them reported seeing Augustus there. Stanton initially claimed that only William Seward, Fred Seward and George Robinson were injured; Augustus Seward, Emerick Hansell and Fanny Seward were later added to the victim list, apparently so that the prosecution would have suitable witnesses. It was an entire month before Fanny Seward came forward with her account of the attack.

Augustus was later presented at trial as both a victim of and an eyewitness to the attack – the attack that very likely didn't take place, in the home he wasn't actually in at the time. His testimony was wildly at odds with that of Robinson, with both men claiming that they had been in the room and personally witnessed the attack on William Seward. Not only did their accounts significantly differ, but neither really explained why it was that with the two of them in the room, and with Frederick and Hansell in the home as well, they were unable to defend the secretary.



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*This remarkable image of Paine, captured in April 1865, has been lovingly colorized*

It is impossible to determine whether the alleged attack ever took place, but it appears extremely unlikely. It does not seem logistically possible for one barely armed man to have done what Paine is

supposed to have done. And it doesn't seem physically possible for him to have done so without sustaining a single visible injury. There is no tangible evidence that Paine ever entered the home. The only 'evidence' that has ever existed is the dubious (and conflicting) accounts told by the alleged victims and by the high-ranking cabinet officials who just happened to be first on the scene.

Let's now briefly review the key elements of this story: two assassins; three targets; numerous people to get through to get to those targets; numerous other people to get by to flee the scene; a city essentially under martial law; and one – exactly one – bullet. Anyone see anything wrong with that scenario?

... to be continued

[Why Everything You Think You Know About the Lincoln Assassination is Wrong: Part III »](#)

[« Why Everything You Think You Know About the Lincoln Assassination is Wrong: Part I](#)

## 2 COMMENTS



1.

**Gustavo Guilherme Carlo** on January 24, 2017 at 2:20 pm

Fanny Brown is my relative, she married William Carlo. My family is from North American circus artists. I'm Engeneer and live in Brazil today.

See Carlo Family in the link.

<http://www.circushistory.org/Olympians/OlympiansC1.htm>

**REPLY**



2.

**Mike Griffith** on August 14, 2018 at 4:14 pm

I believe Welles' account of the crime scene at Seward's house. Welles hated Stanton and the Radicals and was arguably Lincoln's most loyal cabinet member. Welles battled the Radicals his entire time in office under Lincoln and Johnson. I do not believe that Welles would have lied about what he saw at Seward's residence.

Johnson likewise hated Stanton and the Radicals. Indeed, Johnson appears to have suspected that the Radicals played a role in Lincoln's death. On one occasion he publicly voiced this suspicion and drew the Radicals' fury for doing so. Johnson did his best to carry on Lincoln's lenient reconstruction policy. Johnson was enraged when he learned that Stanton had kept him from knowing about the military tribunal's appeal for clemency for Mary Surratt, and he fired Stanton soon thereafter.