

Issue 5: September 2020

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OUR SEPTEMBER MEETING – 9/15/2020

Lincoln's Spies: Their Secret War to Save the Union

Douglas Waller

Lincoln's Spies is a story about dangerous espionage and covert operations during the Civil War. It is told through the lives of four Union agents. Allan Pinkerton, whose detective agency had already brought him fame nationwide, was George McClellan's failed spymaster, delivering inflated intelligence reports that made the Union general even more cautious. Lafayette Baker ran counter-espionage operations in Washington for the War Department, putting hundreds in jail and pocketing cash from graft he uncovered. George Sharpe, a New York lawyer, successfully ran spying for generals Joseph Hooker, George Meade, and Ulysses S. Grant, outpacing anything the Confederates could field. Elizabeth Van Lew, a Virginia heiress, ran a Union espionage ring in Richmond, providing Grant critical information as his army closed in on the Confederate capitol. And behind these secret agents was Abraham Lincoln who became an avid consumer of intelligence and a ruthless aficionado of covert action. The phone tapping, human collection and aerial snooping you see today's spies doing can be traced back to the Civil War.

Douglas Waller is a former correspondent for *Newsweek* and *TIME*, where he covered the CIA, Pentagon, State Department, White House, and Congress. He is author of several bestselling books, including *Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster Who Created the OSS* and *Modern American Espionage*; *The Commandos: The Inside Story of America's Secret Soldiers*; and *Disciples: The World War II Missions of the CIA Directors Who Fought for Wild Bill Donovan*. His latest book is *Lincoln's Spies: Their Secret War to Save the Nation*.



First Minnesota Monument at Gettysburg

2020-2021 SPEAKER SCHEDULE

- October 20, 2020 – David Dixon:** “Union General August Willich”
- November 17, 2020 – Thomas Arliskas:** “General U.S. Grant and the Battle of Belmont”
- December 15, 2020 – Brian Steele Willis:** “General George Henry Thomas”
- January 19, 2021 – John Haymond** “The Infamous Dakota War Trials of 1862”
- February 16, 2021 - John Fazio:** “Decapitating the Union: Jefferson Davis, Judah Benjamin and the Plot to Assassinate Lincoln”
- March 16, 2021 – Leslie Goddard:** “Gone With The Wind and the Construction of Civil War Memory”
- May 18, 2021 – Mike Movius:** “The State of the Civil War Round Tables”

THIS MONTH IN CIVIL WAR HISTORY – SEPTEMBER

- 2nd 1864 – Atlanta surrenders to Union forces under Gen. William T. Sherman
- 5th 1863 – Britain seizes Confederate ships and shipyard
- 6th 1861 – Gen. U.S. Grant moves into Paducah, Kentucky
- 12th – 15th 1861 – Union victory at Cheat Mountain, western Virginia
- 15th 1862 – Confederate Gen. “Stonewall” Jackson captures Harper’s Ferry, Virginia
- 17th 1862 – Battle of Antietam, Maryland
- 19th 1863 – Battle of Chickamauga, Georgia
- 19th 1864 – Battle of Winchester, Virginia
- 24th 1864 – Union Gen. Phillip Sheridan lays waste to the Shenandoah Valley

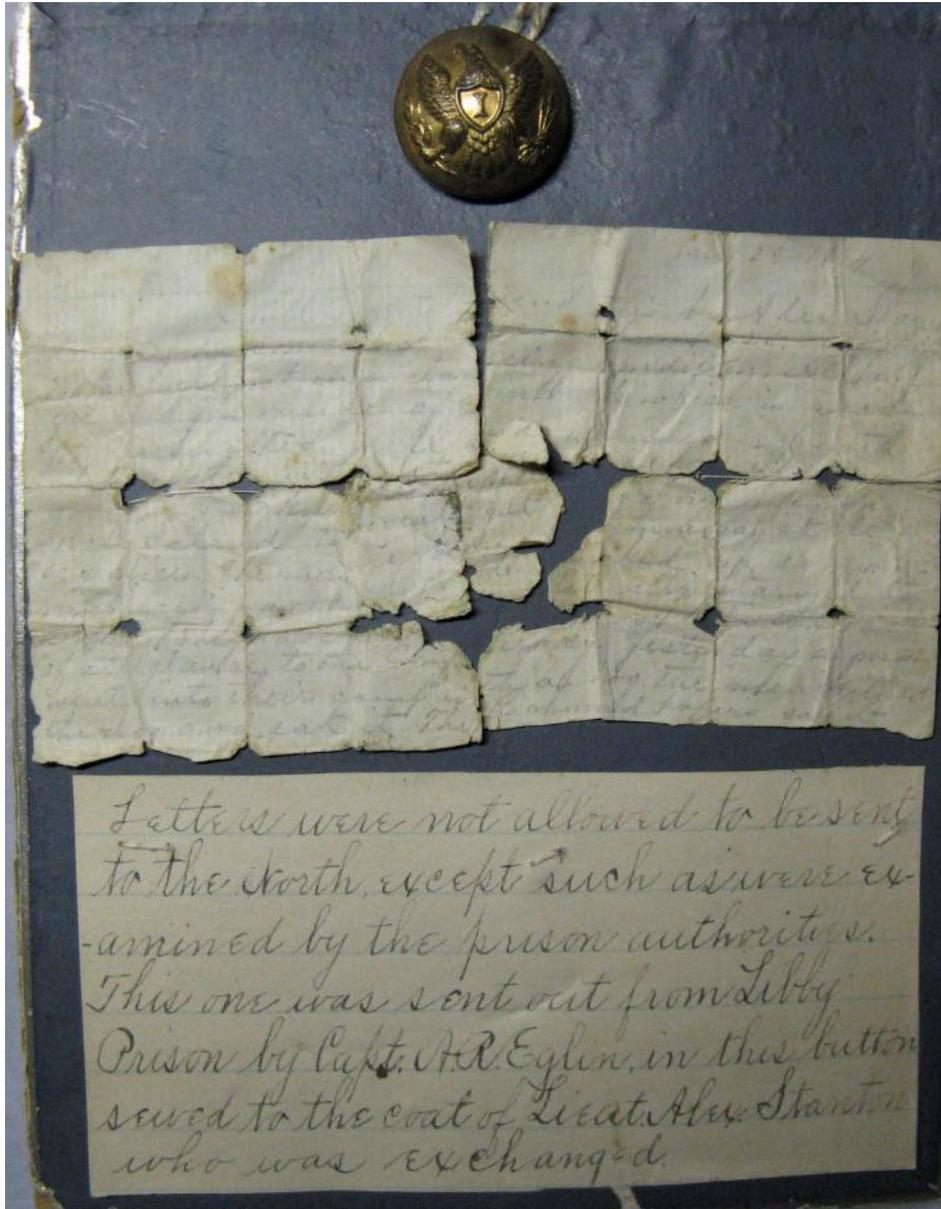
CIVIL WAR BIRTHDAYS THIS MONTH – SEPTEMBER

- 6th 1819 – Gen. William S. Rosecrans U.S.
- 8th 1828 – Gen. Joshua L. Chamberlain, U.S.
- 10th 1836 - Gen. Joseph Wheeler C.S.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Thanks again to Lana Blumhoefer for the Civil War calendar information with some additions by the editor.

From the Dusty Collection: A Message Inside a Button

The 2018 West Coast Historical Militaria Collectors Show in Pomona, California, was where I found this unique item to share. Unfortunately, its full story still needs to be teased out by sharper eyes and some imagination. But here are the basics.



Civil War prisoners of war suffered unimaginable privation, exposure, starvation and disease. Approximately one in eight Confederate prisoners never made it home, while one in six Union prisoners perished – a total of 56,000 young Americans. Artifacts from prisoner of war camps are particularly scarce. Most men had little when they left or were in such poor physical

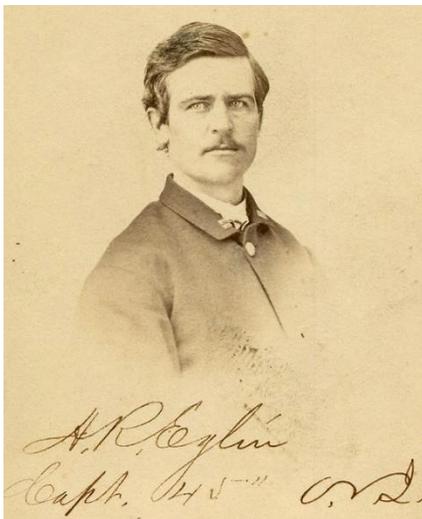


condition that souvenirs were far from their mind. Without an International Red Cross to facilitate communications, families heard nothing from their loved ones who may have survived battle but fell into the black hole of a prison camp.

Union officers like Adam Eglin of the 45th Ohio who were captured in the eastern theater usually passed through Richmond and spent time at the old brick Libby tobacco warehouse. Enlisted men

were penned on the exposed Belle Island in the James River (photo above.) Lieutenant Eglin, in Libby Prison, wrote to his father about his men's privations on Belle Island.

The 45th Ohio Volunteer Infantry organized at Camp Chase in August 1862 to serve three years. In February 1863 it was mounted to better oppose Confederate cavalry in northern Kentucky. It helped to chase John Hunt Morgan's raiders from Ohio, and fought at Buffington Island. But the regiment's luck ran out when it joined Burnside's Campaign in East Tennessee. On October 24, 1863, over 100 men and officers were captured in an action at Philadelphia, Kentucky. The 45th continued that streak of bad luck at the Holston River, Tennessee, and later, amassing more POW losses than any other Ohio unit. Eventually around 274 of its men died in prison or from post-confinement ill health shortly released.

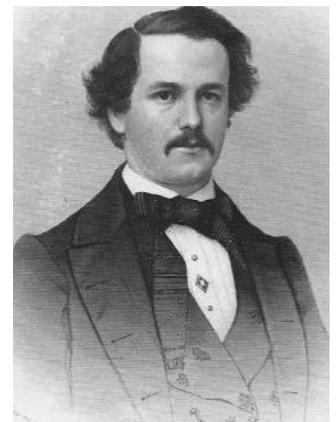


Then Lieutenant Adam Eglin of the 45th Ohio (left) and Lieutenant Alexander Stanton of the 16th US Infantry were captured in the fall of 1863. Eglin had enlisted in the 26th Ohio in July 1861 and was discharged as a corporal to accept his commission in the 82nd Ohio, later moving to the 45th.

Yale graduate Alexander Hamilton Stanton (right) was one of the first 1861 volunteers and served a short time in the 13th Ohio before accepting a commission into the 16th U.S. Infantry in July 1861. Captured at Chickamauga, he was

exchanged and returned to his unit but was cashiered in December 1864.

Surprisingly, he was again commissioned as a captain in the U.S. Veteran Volunteers the following summer. He then served four years as regular army cavalry officer and was breveted for gallantry fighting Ute Indians before his early death in 1870.





Both captured officers were taken to Richmond where Stanton was exchanged in late January 1864. (His father, a well-connected lawyer then serving as lieutenant governor of Ohio, may have pulled strings.) Lieutenant Eglin's confinement continued longer; he reportedly also spent time in the prisons at Macon, Georgia and Columbia, South Carolina. Eventually released, he returned to the 45th Ohio, was promoted to captain and mustered out in June 1865.

Lieutenant Eglin's secret note to his father was carefully preserved by his family who stitched the button to a card with the time-worn note and this descriptive label:

Letters were not allowed to be sent to the North except such as were examined by the prison authorities. This one was sent out from Libby Prison by Capt. A. R. Eglin in this button sewed to the coat of Lieut. Alex. Stanton who was exchanged.

The note itself measures about 2.5 X 5 inches and was tightly folded to fit inside the infantry officer's coat button. Lightly written in pencil, it is unfortunately very difficult to read from fading and paper loss. This is a partial, but by no means perfect, transcription:

Jan. 28th 1864

Dear father,

I will secret and send this by Alex. Stanton if he comes and ...

We are almost in a starving condition. All we get is eight ounces of cornbread which is made of unsifted meal and issued ...

..... suffering of our men on

Bell Island. They would get them away ...

sacrifices. The men are being asked up every day...

of allegiance to the Confederacy. Yesterday a man

went into their camp with a dog. The men killed

the dog and eat it. The Richmond papers said



[Reverse side]

was account of a... in taste. How long...

.....I write

you to send...remember a can

of butter.....put 5.00 in a letter

and send.....

Yr. aft. Son

A. R. Eglin

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Can you contribute to a future newsletter? Writers are wanted to submit Civil War related articles to this newsletter.

Please submit your drafts to Bruce Cooper: earlofbruce@hotmail.com