HE ALMOST SAVED LINCOLN. - Boston Sunday Globe December 12 1897 page 36

David Dana, Brother of Charles A. Dana, Tried to Prevent the Assassination of the Martyr President---Now a dweller in Lubec, Me. He Tells of His Pursuit of Booth.

Away down in a remote corner of New England, in the most easterly town in this broad country, dwells the man who alone had knowledge beforehand of the meditated assassination of Lincoln, and who tried by every means in his power to thwart the conspiracy, but all in vain.

This man, David Dana, brother of the late Charles A. Dana, is a most unique and interesting character, and one who has seen his full share of life, and has been a part of the most stirring events in our country's history. It was the writer's good fortune recently to hear him tell of the part he took in the pursuit of the assassin, Booth and his accomplice, Harold. Inasmuch as the story gives facts never before laid before the public the recital cannot fail to be of great interest to every one who has ever perused the story of these exciting times.

"In the spring of 65 I was near Washington," began Mr. Dana, "with my headquarters at Fort Baker, just above the east branch of the Potomac. It was within the lines of the 3d brigade of Harden's division, 22d corps, commanded by Gen. C. C. Augur, under whom I was provost marshal. I had authority over nearly all those parts of Maryland lying between the east branch of the Potomac and the Patuxent river. This part of the state was swarming with rebels,

and I was commissioned to watch all their movements and learn if possible of any plots against the federal government.

"While patrolling this territory I learned that a plot was forming against the government, and that the blow would undoubtedly be aimed against the life of Pres. Lincoln. I at once asked for a battalion of veteran cavalry, in addition to the regular provost guard, and the request was granted. I was ordered to establish a line of pickets from Fort Meigs on the left to Geisboro point on the right, with orders to permit none to enter the city of Washington during the day unless they could give their names, where they were from, and what was their business at the capital.

"From sundown to sunrise no one was to enter or leave the city except in case of sickness or death. All suspicious persons were arrested and sent to the commanding general for examination.

"On Friday, April 14, 1865, two men appeared before the guard on the road leading into Washington from the east. Refusing to give their names or state their business, they were arrested and put in the guard tent, whence they were to be sent to headquarters. This was about 1 o'clock in the afternoon. In an hour or two they gave their names as Booth and Harold.

"The officers on guard under me had carried out my orders so strictly that it was very annoying to the rebel sympathizers who wished access to the city, so that many complaints were made by prominent citizens of Maryland.

"About 4 p m I received an order from Gen Augur to release all prisoners held by the guards, and to withdraw the guard until further orders. I sent an orderly to the officers on the line from fort Meigs easterly, with orders to release all prisoners, and to report to me at fort Baker. On the line from fort Meigs to Surrattville I went in person, and withdrew the guard to my headquarters.

"Booth and Harold were released as soon as the orders reached the guard, and they proceeded at once to Washington, reaching there about 6.30 in the afternoon. I had a guard at each end of the bridge on the eastern branch of the Potomac, and one of the guards knew Booth, and recognized him as he rode into the city, and as he came out after the assassination, and had it been known that he had killed Lincoln escape would have been impossible.

"I returned to headquarters about 11 p m, and had dismissed the guard, and was eating supper, when an officer rode into camp with the startling intelligence that Lincoln was killed, and that the murderer, with another man, had ridden at a rapid pace into the country.

"I called out the guard, and sent detachments in different directions, and then went to the bridge to learn what I could there. On my way I met a company of cavalry, the 13th New York, which I ordered to patrol the river to Guisi point and learn all they could, and then return to fort Baker.

"At the bridge I found an orderly from Gen Augur with orders for me to report to him at Washington without delay. I did so, and was ushered into his presence, where I found him standing by his desk with streaming eyes. 'My God, Marshall,' he cried upon seeing me, 'if I had listened to your advice this terrible thing never would have happened!'

"After conversing with him a few moments, I was appointed adjutant general on his staff, and ordered to use my own judgment as to the best way of capturing Booth. The order read as follows:

"'To commanders of all divisions, brigades, regiments, companies and posts:

You will obey all orders emanating from Adjt Gen and Provost Marshall D. D. Dana the same as though especially issued from these headquarters.

(Signed) Maj Gen C. C. Augur,
Commanding 22d corps in Dept of Washington."

"While with Gen Augur and by his request I laid out the plan for the capture of Booth. First, one of the swiftest steamers which could be obtained should patrol the Potomac as far as the Patuxent river and seize all boats which could not give a good account of themselves. Then a steamer should be sent up the Patuxent and all boats on this river were to be seized at all hazards to as far as Horse Head ferry.

"These orders were telegraphed to the boats on the Patuxent and were carried out to the letter. The reason was this: In scouting

through Maryland I had learned that a boat would be used by the assassin, who would go by land to the Patuxent, thence across to the Albert river, from there to the Atlantic coast, and thence to Mexico. The only thing that prevented Booth's escape was the seizure of these boats.

"I returned to fort Baker, left orders for the cavalry, who were out scouting, took a small detachment of my own guard and started after Booth, taking the road by Surrattville to Bryantown. As we passed by the Surratt mansion all was as dark as though it had never been inhabited, but I found an old man and woman who had a boy sick with the smallpox. Finding that no information could be obtained there from the old man or his wife I took him along with us for a mile and a half to a secluded dell. Refusing to give the desired information, I ordered him to be strung up to the limb of a big oak tree.

"It was a clear night, with the moon just rising, its silvery glints touching the tops of the trees in the dell and the flickering light of the campfire which the men had kindled casting fantastic shadows here and there. The rope was made fast about the old man's neck and at a signal from me he was hoisted up and suspended between heaven and earth. It was a weird and gruesome scene, there in the light of the fire and the moon was the swaying body of the man struggling in his futile efforts to grasp the rope while the spasmodic action of his body and the gurgling sounds from his throat produced an effect never to be forgotten.

"I ordered him to be cut down after a few moments and he was resuscitated. Rather than try a second pull on the rope he told me that Booth and Harold had been at the Surratt mansion, had had something to eat and drink, and that after supper, though Booth was badly hurt, they had mounted their horses and rode toward Bryantown.

"I pushed on after them and a few miles from Bryantown I came to a detachment of 10 men under a sergeant as patrol guard to watch suspicious people in that section. I sent the sergeant to Port Tobacco at once, and ordered the troops to scout up the Patuxent river, to arrest all suspicious persons and to report to me at Bryantown. The patrol guard afterward acknowledged that they heard the clatter of Booth's and Harold's horses' feet, as they passed by on the road leading to Dr. Samuel Mudd's toward Bryantown.

"This came about from the fact that a short distance above the guard was a road leading to Dr. Mudd's, who resided about three and a half miles from the village and that this road the pair had taken, reaching the doctor's house about 4 a m, about two hours ahead of my troops.

"I arrived at Bryantown about 6, and at once placed guards at all the roads leading into the village, with orders that any one might enter the town but that none were to leave

it. About 2 o'clock that afternoon the detachment of troops from Port Tobacco reached me. In the meantime troops had been sent to Woodbine ferry and Horsehead ferry, all the boats had been seized and all crossing of the river had been stopped.

"By taking possession of these positions and seizing the ferry boats and by closely guarding the line of the river, Booth's chances of escape this way were cut off. Could he have got across the Patuxent river into Calvert county, he would most certainly have reached Mexico in safety.

"After Booth and Harold arrived at Dr. Mudd's, Booth's leg was set, and after giving them their breakfast the doctor made a crutch for Booth and fixed him up ready to start at an instant's notice.

"Dr. Mudd came into Bryantown at 2 in the afternoon and stayed there until 8 or 9 in the evening, when a cousin of his, Dr. George Mudd, asked as a personal favor a pass for him through the lines. After closely questioning Samuel Mudd, and believing him to know nothing of Booth, and having confidence in what his cousin said, I let Dr. Samuel Mudd go.

"During the doctor's long absence Booth got uneasy and sent Harold on horseback to Bryantown. Learning that troops were in the town, he tied his horse in a large clump of willows that grew on the side of a stream near the road, and there watched for Dr. Mudd's return.

"When the doctor made his appearance, Harold came out and the two returned to the doctor's house. Booth was anxious to leave at once, but the good doctor assured him that there was no danger that night.

"George Mudd, let me say in passing, never intimated to me that his friend was a doctor, or was a relative of his. I learned the next day, when it was too late, that his cousin was a rank rebel, and I plainly told George Mudd what I thought of him.

"The fugitives left Dr. Mudd's early the next morning, and took the road for Horsehead ferry. When within 2½ miles of the ferry they saw a man of about 60 years leaning on a fence in front of his house. Booth rode up and asked him if he had heard the news of Lincoln's being killed. He said yes, he had heard it from some troops that had arrived at the ferry. Booth asked him if there were any troops then at Horsehead, and the man told him there were.

"Booth got a drink of water, and wanted a drink of whisky, but the old man had none. He asked the men who they were, and Booth answered: "Detectives looking for Booth and Harold.' 'What are you doing with a crutch?' was the rejoinder.

"The assassin explained that his horse had stumbled, and had fallen upon him, hurting his leg very badly. They asked the way to Woodbine ferry, and, being directed, set off at

at a brisk trot.

"When within two miles of Woodbine ferry they met an old darky, and inquired: "How far is it tothe ferry?" Upon being told they asked him the news. 'Massa Lincum's killed an' Woodbine ferry's chock full ob troops.' 'How many, uncle?' asked Booth. 'Golly Massa, dere's more'n a hundred! Dey's swarming like bees!' answered the negro.

"The horsemen rode on a short distance through a gate into a mowing field, and there all trace of their horses' footprints were lost. But they returned to the vicinity of Dr. Mudd's and entered the Sekiah swamp from the east. They made their way to a small island near the middle of the swamp, where they spent two days and two nights, being supplied with food by friends near by.

"I had made arrangements for a detachment of troops to scour the swamp with a guide, when a heavy storm came on and made it impossible. Had I done so I would certainly have caught them, as they did not leave until 2 or 3 o'clock that day. When my troops reached the island the next day they found where the horses had been tethered, and the very moss where Booth and Harold had slept. They also found the pieces of blanket with which their horses' hoofs had been muffled. How they made their way from Woodbine ferry tothe swamp is a mystery. It could only have been done by wrapping the horses' feet in blankets.

"The different movements they made from the time of the assassination to their reaching Sekiah swamp shows that they had their course all laid out beforehand. They knew where to go and who their friends were, and were only prevented from escaping by the rapid movements of the troops under my command.

"Sekiah swamp lies a short distance nearly west of Bryantown. It is full of quagmires and sinkholes, and is exceedingly dangerous to enter except by daytime. Even then great caution is required unless a person is acquainted with the swamp. Booth and Harold must have had a guide both in going in and coming out.

"They never could have got their horses there alone, to attempt it would have been the last of them.

"There is a small stream running through the swamp, but large enough to float a small boat. It discharges into the Patuxent river. After leaving the swamp the fugitives went to a log cabin in a thick growth of pines and underbrush quite distant from any road. It was the dwelling of a man named Jones,who had a negress for housekeeper. It was in that scrubby pine and underbrush, back of the house, that the two horses were killed and buried.

"Here Booth and Harold were kept three or four days, when they were taken by boat down the outlet of the swamp to

a point below where the troops were stationed, and from there they were carried in a wagon to a point on the Patuxent, nearly opposite Aquia creek. From here they were taken across the Potomac and made their way to Garrett's near Bowling Green, where Booth was killed."

Mr. Dana is 71 years old, yet strong and hale and capable of weathering a good many more of Maine's rough winters. In personal appearance he bears a striking resemblance to his noted brother, though somewhat shorter in stature. His face is as ruddy and his eye as bright and keen as a boy's.

Though somewhat stooped by the heavy labor of the farm his step is brisk, and it would tire many a younger man to follow him through a day's work.

Mr. Dana lives in a small one-story farmhouse in West Lubec, Maine, on the ancestral farm of his wife's people. He came here some 20 years ago, when the opening of the lead mines in this vicinity promised to make Lubec famous the world over.

After a few years of extravagant expenditures on the part of the managers work in the mines ceased and Mr. Dana settled down to the quiet life of a farmer with his wife and pets,of which he always has a great number.

Though living nearly eight miles from the nearest village Mr. Dana is by no means a recluse, but is well informed on all the events of the day, is an omnivorous reader and an ardent advocate of free silver.

(The above story was taken from the Boston Sunday Globe, dated December 12, 1897 - page 36, columns 3, 4, and 5.)