

1

00:00:00,961 --> 00:00:10,957

This series presents information based in part on theory and conjecture.

2

00:00:10,957 --> 00:00:20,953

The producer's purpose is to suggest some possible explanations, but not necessarily the only ones to the mysteries we will examine.

3

00:00:21,953 --> 00:00:29,949

America's 16th president, Abraham Lincoln, was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth in 1865.

4

00:00:29,949 --> 00:00:36,947

Nine people were brought to trial. Five were imprisoned. Four were hanged.

5

00:00:39,945 --> 00:00:45,943

Only circumstantial evidence convicted for conspirators was justice done.

6

00:00:51,941 --> 00:00:56,939

Lincoln assassination historian, Professor William Hatchett.

7

00:00:56,939 --> 00:01:08,934

Lincoln has been our most beloved president, and that means that we don't fully appreciate that at the time during the Civil War, he was also our most hated president.

8

00:01:08,934 --> 00:01:17,930

And he was hated for two things. He was hated, first of all, for one of the things that he's most honored now, for freeing the slaves.

9

00:01:18,930 --> 00:01:25,927

But pro-slavery people, and Booth was certainly pro-slavery, thought that this was a terrible thing for the United States.

10

00:01:25,927 --> 00:01:32,924

The second thing for which Lincoln was hated by many people was his suppression of civil liberty.

11

00:01:32,924 --> 00:01:42,920

So when Booth called Emperor Taranus after he shot Lincoln and jumped to the stage at Ford's Theater, he really believed that he was killing a tyrant.

12

00:01:42,920 --> 00:01:51,916

And killing a tyrant is no crime or no sin. During World War II, we would have respected somebody who killed Adolf Hitler.

13

00:01:51,916 --> 00:01:58,914

And many people, Booth among them, thought of Lincoln as we thought of Hitler.

14

00:01:58,914 --> 00:02:04,911

John Wilkes Booth, a renowned actor in the South, sought worldwide fame that would last throughout history.

15

00:02:04,911 --> 00:02:12,908

An opportunity arose during the Civil War to serve both his ego and his beloved Confederacy with one dramatic act.

16

00:02:12,908 --> 00:02:16,906

September 1864, the plot was born.

17

00:02:16,906 --> 00:02:20,905

It wasn't a conspiracy to assassinate from the beginning.

18

00:02:20,905 --> 00:02:32,900

Sometime late in the summer of 1864, Booth got the idea of kidnapping Lincoln and holding him ransom for the Confederate prisoners.

19

00:02:32,900 --> 00:02:35,899

In the United States, Christmas or camp.

20

00:02:35,899 --> 00:02:41,896

And he approached two of his boyhood friends, Samuel Arnold and Michael O'Loughlin, about it.

21

00:02:41,896 --> 00:02:47,894

They thought it was a feasible thing to do. Lincoln frequently drove around Washington without an escort.

22

00:02:47,894 --> 00:02:55,891

Lincoln Historian and Author of Murder at Ford's Theater, Mr. James O. Hall.

23

00:02:55,891 --> 00:03:10,885

Now, I rather think that Booth was handed the kidnap plot in Boston about the end of July, 1864, because he met there with three Confederate agents.

24

00:03:10,885 --> 00:03:12,884

What they talked about, no one knows.

25

00:03:12,884 --> 00:03:20,881

But immediately after that, he started gathering together the people who would help him kidnap the president.

26

00:03:20,881 --> 00:03:27,878

And they had a meeting on the night of the 15th of March in which they were going to discuss this.

27

00:03:27,878 --> 00:03:32,876

They had this meeting at Gaudier's Restaurant on Pennsylvania Avenue.

28

00:03:32,876 --> 00:03:40,873

Booth, being in the theater, concluded that the kidnapping of Lincoln just had to be sensational.

29

00:03:40,873 --> 00:03:46,870

So he was going to kidnap him in Ford's Theater.

30

00:03:46,870 --> 00:03:54,867

They all gathered together and got a little drunk and got into an argument about how they were going to kidnap Lincoln.

31

00:03:54,867 --> 00:03:59,865

Arnold said he'd have no part of kidnapping a man at Ford's Theater.

32

00:03:59,865 --> 00:04:09,861

And O'Loughlin said it was suicide. But Booth insisted. The thing never came off in Ford's Theater.

33

00:04:10,861 --> 00:04:14,859

March 17th, 1865, a kidnap attempt was made.

34

00:04:14,859 --> 00:04:24,855

Booth learned that Lincoln was going to attend a matinee performance of Still Waters Run Deep at the soldier's home on the outskirts of Washington, D.C.

35

00:04:24,855 --> 00:04:28,854

Historical reports are mixed on what really happened.

36

00:04:28,854 --> 00:04:33,852

This version is based on lectures given by John Surratt, one of the conspiracies.

37

00:04:33,852 --> 00:04:37,850

Booth led two of his men out of the city toward the hospital.

38

00:04:37,850 --> 00:04:43,848

They were armed and prepared to confront Lincoln's carriage during his return to Washington.

39

00:04:55,843 --> 00:05:02,840

Choosing a secluded spot on a deserted stretch of road, Booth left his men with instructions to await his signal for ambush.

40

00:05:02,840 --> 00:05:05,839

Then rode out to track the carriage.

41

00:05:07,838 --> 00:05:27,830

Music

42

00:05:27,830 --> 00:05:35,827

As he prepared to give the signal, Booth discovered that the occupant of the carriage was not Lincoln, but Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase.

43

00:05:38,825 --> 00:05:41,824

Booth rode off and raged at his failure.

44

00:05:45,823 --> 00:05:53,819

Later he was to learn that Lincoln had stayed in Washington and delivered a battle flag to the Governor of Indiana from a balcony of the National Hotel.

45

00:05:53,819 --> 00:05:57,818

It was the hotel where Booth lived.

46

00:05:57,818 --> 00:06:04,815

Then there was a change in Booth's plans. And I think it's probably fair to date it on April 11th.

47

00:06:05,815 --> 00:06:15,811

When Booth, in company with David Harreld, who was one of the members of his group, and Louis Payne, another member, attended a lecture at the White House.

48

00:06:15,811 --> 00:06:22,808

During this speech, Lincoln said that he was going to urge that some black men be given the vote.

49

00:06:22,808 --> 00:06:28,805

Booth was outraged at this suggestion and he turned to Payne right then and said, shoot him.

50

00:06:29,805 --> 00:06:32,804

And of course Payne refused to do that.

51

00:06:32,804 --> 00:06:39,801

But then he turned to David Harreld, the other companion, and said, that's the last speech he'll ever make.

52

00:06:39,801 --> 00:06:47,798

So it's possible that then Booth did decide if opportunity arose that he would kill Lincoln.

53

00:06:47,798 --> 00:07:00,793

So you see, whether the kidnapping plot just came over into a plot to murder, whether it was one conspiracy or two, you have to remember this.

54

00:07:00,793 --> 00:07:07,790

That anytime anyone plans to kidnap a President of the United States, they must be prepared to kill.

55

00:07:07,790 --> 00:07:12,788

And they had armaments in the kidnapping plot.

56

00:07:12,788 --> 00:07:24,783

So it could be that this plan to kidnap Lincoln just drifted naturally in Booth's fanatical mind into a plot to murder.

57

00:07:24,783 --> 00:07:30,781

April 14th, Booth knew that Lincoln would attend Ford's Theater that evening.

58

00:07:30,781 --> 00:07:33,779

He met with members of his group still in Washington.

59

00:07:33,779 --> 00:07:38,777

It was only at this meeting that he told them that he was going to assassinate the President.

60

00:07:38,777 --> 00:07:42,776

And he gave Payne the assignment of killing Seward.

61

00:07:42,776 --> 00:07:45,775

He told Absorba to get Andrew Johnson.

62

00:07:45,775 --> 00:07:51,772

You see, Booth's plan was a massive conspiracy against the leadership of the government of the United States.

63

00:07:51,772 --> 00:07:57,770

The President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, and the General-in-Chief.

64

00:07:57,770 --> 00:08:05,767

He may have believed that by killing the leaders of the United States, the Confederacy could still win its independence.

65

00:08:05,767 --> 00:08:09,765

On April 13th, 1865, Booth wrote in his journal,

66

00:08:09,765 --> 00:08:16,762

For six months we had worked to capture, but our cause being almost lost, something decisive and great, must be done.

67

00:08:16,762 --> 00:08:21,760

Though only a few of Booth's co-conspirators would now be involved in this plot to murder,

68

00:08:21,760 --> 00:08:25,759

everyone he had touched in the previous months would be tainted with guilt.

69

00:08:25,759 --> 00:08:29,757

John Wilkes Booth, self-appointed leader.

70

00:08:29,757 --> 00:08:33,755

Louis Payne Powell, held prisoner by the Union.

71

00:08:33,755 --> 00:08:37,754

George Atserot, ferrying contraband across the Potomac.

72

00:08:37,754 --> 00:08:41,752

David Herald, a rather dull youth who followed Booth blindly.

73

00:08:41,752 --> 00:08:46,750

Michael Oloflin, Confederate deserter and boyhood friend of Booth.

74

00:08:46,750 --> 00:08:49,749

Edmund Spangler, stagehand at Ford's Theatre.

75

00:08:49,749 --> 00:08:54,747

Samuel Arnold, Booth's schoolmate, former Confederate soldier.

76

00:08:54,747 --> 00:08:59,745

8.30 p.m. April 14th, Lincoln is seated in his box at Ford's Theatre.

77

00:08:59,745 --> 00:09:07,742

9.30 p.m. Booth rides up Baptist Alley behind Ford's Theatre, dismounts and calls for Spangler to hold his horse.

78

00:09:07,742 --> 00:09:11,740

Instead, a boy, peanut John Burrow, responds.

79

00:09:11,740 --> 00:09:16,738

Booth enters backstage and crosses to the adjoining star saloon.

80

00:09:20,736 --> 00:09:27,734

There, he orders whiskey and waits, as the rest of the plot unfolds throughout the city.

81

00:09:30,732 --> 00:09:35,730

10.03 p.m.

82

00:09:35,730 --> 00:09:40,728

Payne gains access to Secretary of State Seward's home.

83

00:09:40,728 --> 00:09:44,727

Seward was severely wounded, but would live.

84

00:09:44,727 --> 00:09:49,725

Payne had failed. Booth was determined to succeed.

85

00:09:54,723 --> 00:09:58,721

Booth enters the theatre from the front, climbs to the balcony.

86

00:09:58,721 --> 00:10:02,720

Crosses to the president's box.

87

00:10:02,720 --> 00:10:08,717

Being familiar with the play, he knows at exactly what point there will be sustained laughter and

applause.

88

00:10:17,714 --> 00:10:22,712

Dr. John Latimer, historian, physician and ballistics expert.

89

00:10:23,711 --> 00:10:31,708

The actual pistol that Booth used to shoot President Lincoln was one like this, called a derringer.

90

00:10:31,708 --> 00:10:40,704

A derringer is a short barrel gun firing a very large ball, and the velocity and the energy are very fatal if fired directly into the head.

91

00:10:40,704 --> 00:10:49,701

Being a single-shot pistol, of course, was useless after this fired-shot, and Booth then threw it down and pulled out his hunting knife.

92

00:10:49,701 --> 00:10:56,698

When the major wrath bone that was in the box with him grappled with him, he stabbed him badly in the arm.

93

00:10:56,698 --> 00:11:11,692

The major staggered back, and Booth went over to the edge of the box and vaulted over onto the stage, fell feet below a flamboyant, dangerous type of action that did indeed result in his breaking one of the small bones in his leg just above the ankle.

94

00:11:11,692 --> 00:11:16,690

Booth ran from the theatre and began his desperate, rive Booth's freedom.

95

00:11:20,688 --> 00:11:30,684

He exited the alley with members of the audience in pursuit, rode down F Street, and across the Navy Yard Bridge into the Maryland countryside.

96

00:11:33,683 --> 00:11:37,682

Booth went to Soppers Hill to await David Harold.

97

00:11:38,681 --> 00:11:47,678

Harold was to leave pain out of the city, but for reasons never explained, he arrived alone.

98

00:11:47,678 --> 00:11:58,673

From Soppers Hill, they went to Saratville, arriving at the Sarat Tavern around midnight. Here they would pick up carbines, whiskey, and a pair of spy glasses.

99

00:11:58,673 --> 00:12:06,670

Mary Sarat, one of the accused conspirators, allegedly delivered these glasses for Booth on the morning of the assassination.

100

00:12:07,670 --> 00:12:13,667

4 a.m. April 15th, Booth and Harold arrive at the home of Dr. Samuel Mudd.

101

00:12:14,667 --> 00:12:21,664

It is known that Mudd was acquainted with Booth, for that he knew of Booth's deed remains a question.

102

00:12:21,664 --> 00:12:28,661

The broken leg was set and the Booth was left behind. It was to become a damning piece of evidence.

103

00:12:28,661 --> 00:12:36,658

April 26th, federal troops captured Harold and cornered Booth at Garrett's farm. They set fire to the barn to smoke him out.

104

00:12:37,657 --> 00:12:42,655

The barn was brilliantly illuminated. They could all see Booth very clearly.

105

00:12:42,655 --> 00:12:57,649

Booth came back first towards the corner of the barn and Booth then decided that he couldn't fight the blaze and started towards the front door with his crutch and a very heavy Spencer carbine fully loaded in one hand.

106

00:12:57,649 --> 00:13:06,646

As he went towards the front of the barn, he pulled out one of his revolvers from his belt and almost immediately a pistol shot rang out.

107

00:13:06,646 --> 00:13:17,641

And down went Booth, shot through the neck. Then they dragged him out and up to the back porch of the farmhouse and he died within about two hours.

108

00:13:17,641 --> 00:13:27,637

The cry then went up, who shot him? Because they certainly wanted to capture him and have him for testimony and here he was dead.

109

00:13:28,637 --> 00:13:39,633

And the man that stepped forward was Boston Corbett. One of the great questions is whether Boston Corbett actually shot John Wilkes Booth or whether Booth committed suicide.

110

00:13:39,633 --> 00:13:49,629

We know that the bullet hole through John Wilkes Booth's neck went slightly downhill and we knew the bullet came in from his right and went downhill going to the left.

111

00:13:49,629 --> 00:14:03,623

Now this enormous pistol, if you try to shoot yourself that way in the neck, you find that your arm isn't long enough to make it easy to do in this manner and they surely would have seen him do it.

112

00:14:03,623 --> 00:14:15,618

You have to switch it around and you have to use your thumb if you're going to do this in order to press the trigger in order to make it and create the kind of wound that Booth had.

113

00:14:15,618 --> 00:14:26,614

So it seems very unlikely just on that basis alone that he shot himself and if you're going to shoot yourself, you're going to shoot yourself in the side of the neck would be the last place you would want to do it because you might miss.

114

00:14:26,614 --> 00:14:30,612

The question was asked, was it really Booth who had been shot?

115

00:14:31,612 --> 00:14:36,610

At the autopsy, Dr. Woodward took some pains to be sure who he was autopsying.

116

00:14:36,610 --> 00:14:54,603

He had witnesses in who identified Booth and he then described on Booth's hand his initials which Booth himself had tattooed on them as a child in a scraggly childish scrawl but which were undoubtedly his.

117

00:14:54,603 --> 00:15:01,600

Booth was buried in the old penitentiary. Another Booth was publicly dumped in the Potomac. Why?

118

00:15:01,600 --> 00:15:11,596

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton may have ordered this charade to dissuade grave robbers. He was to be questioned for many of his policies following the assassination.

119

00:15:11,596 --> 00:15:23,591

He had taken the reins of a crippled government, ordered hasty arrests of seemingly innocent people, rapidly convened a military trial and ordered the prisoners to be held under tortuous conditions.

120

00:15:23,591 --> 00:15:34,587

Nobody ever accused Stanton of involvement in the assassination until Otto Eisenschimmel published that preposterous book, *Why Was Lincoln Murdered* in 1937.

121

00:15:34,587 --> 00:15:49,580

It's almost a criminal case of loading the dice against Stanton, taking every circumstance in the most innocent ones and giving them sinister implications.

122

00:15:50,580 --> 00:16:02,575

For example, it's frequently said that because Stanton ordered the men prisoners to be hooded so that they couldn't talk, that he was afraid that they would implicate him in the assassination.

123

00:16:02,575 --> 00:16:09,572

And this has been repeated time after time as one of the best indications that Stanton had something to hide.

124

00:16:09,572 --> 00:16:17,569

But it's ridiculous. The Stanton's and the Lincoln's were close to each other. Lincoln and Stanton respected each other.

125

00:16:17,569 --> 00:16:25,566

And you see that the misfortune is that in recent years since 1937, it's just the exact opposite which has become known.

126

00:16:25,566 --> 00:16:41,560

Atzerot arrested April 14th. Michael O'Loughlin, Edward Spangler, and Samuel Arnold arrested April 17th. Trial historian Edward Steers.

127

00:16:41,560 --> 00:16:55,554

The trial was hampered by very serious legal questions, principle of which was due process. Military tribunals and commissions unfortunately didn't really represent defendant's peers.

128

00:16:55,554 --> 00:17:01,552

And the rules of evidence were markedly changed during military tribunal and commission.

129

00:17:01,552 --> 00:17:09,548

It's not to say that the outcome would have been any different than it was had they even tried in a civil court in the District of Columbia.

130

00:17:09,548 --> 00:17:15,546

But needless to say, it caused a great deal of difficulty.

131

00:17:15,546 --> 00:17:21,544

Mary Serrat may have been convicted only to serve as bait for her son, John, a primary suspect.

132

00:17:21,544 --> 00:17:27,541

The Serrat Society was formed to preserve her memory, Society President Joan Chaconis.

133

00:17:27,541 --> 00:17:35,538

There were actually three things that convicted Mrs. Serrat, I suppose, in the trial. One was the fact that she knew Booth.

134

00:17:35,538 --> 00:17:44,534

Her son introduced his mother to the actor John Lux Booth. He would come to the house to visit the son. If the son wasn't there, then he'd stop and chat with the ladies.

135

00:17:44,534 --> 00:17:54,530

And of course, this was all brought out during the trial that Booth was there. And if he didn't talk with the son, John, then he was talking to Mrs. Serrat. And what did they talk about?

136

00:17:54,530 --> 00:18:08,525

Whether she knew exactly what he was doing is questionable. However, if you're a mother today with a teenage son, you might have a suspicion that he's doing something that possibly he shouldn't be doing.

137

00:18:08,525 --> 00:18:13,523

But you probably don't think it's going to come to any evil or any harm.

138

00:18:13,523 --> 00:18:20,520

The second thing was Louis Thornton Powell, the fellow who was told by Booth to go and kill the Secretary of State, Seward.

139

00:18:20,520 --> 00:18:29,516

Well, unfortunately for Mrs. Serrat, just as the soldiers are at her house downtown questioning her about the whereabouts of her son, John Jr. and John Lux Booth,

140

00:18:29,516 --> 00:18:39,512

we should come knocking at the door with Louis Thornton Powell and the soldier in the house, the detectives, they enter the door and wonder, who is he? What's he doing here?

141

00:18:39,512 --> 00:18:45,510

And he says, well, he came here because Mrs. Serrat wanted him to dig a ditch for him, for her the next morning.

142

00:18:45,510 --> 00:18:52,507

This seemed very strange and Mrs. Serrat was called to come out here and identify this man and she said she didn't know who he was.

143

00:18:52,507 --> 00:18:57,505

The most damning evidence came from John Lloyd, keeper of the Serrat Tavern.

144

00:18:57,505 --> 00:19:06,501

The evidence that John Lloyd gave was that Mrs. Serrat gave him a message to have some shooting irons ready. Some people were coming by later to pick him up.

145

00:19:06,501 --> 00:19:17,497

And she gave him a package to deliver to those same people. Whether she knew what was in the package, this supposedly contained Booth's five glasses.

146

00:19:17,497 --> 00:19:31,491

She didn't know what was in that package. These are all things that are based on circumstances and there's nothing really, no concrete evidence to show that she really had anything to do or any knowledge that Booth was planning to kill the President.

147

00:19:31,491 --> 00:19:40,488

Five members of the Commission met and signed a clemency plea on behalf of Mary Serrat asking Johnson to commuted sentence to life imprisonment.

148

00:19:40,488 --> 00:19:51,483

Holt maintains that on July 5th when he presented the findings to Johnson, he also showed him the clemency plea and that Johnson ignored it or turned it down.

149

00:19:51,483 --> 00:20:00,480

Johnson maintains that he never saw the clemency plea and was totally unaware of it and upheld the final sentences as recommended by the Commission.

150

00:20:00,480 --> 00:20:02,479

July 7th, 1865.

151

00:20:02,479 --> 00:20:14,474

The hangman was getting tired of taking this very stiff rope and making eight turns on every one of the men's knots and by the time he got to Mrs. Serrat since he didn't think it would be used, he

only put five turns on her knot.

152

00:20:14,474 --> 00:20:19,472

And then to his horror, the knot was indeed used to hang her.

153

00:20:19,472 --> 00:20:25,470

Mary Serrat became the first woman to be hanged by the federal government.

154

00:20:25,470 --> 00:20:33,467

Did Booth go to Dr. Mudd's only for medical assistance? Some say Mudd also gave provisions. This could not be proven.

155

00:20:33,467 --> 00:20:43,463

Mudd was sentenced to life in prison on evidence that Booth's knee-high boot was found at his home. How many others were convicted on circumstantial evidence?

156

00:20:43,463 --> 00:20:53,459

It was the government's position that all of these individuals participated in the conspiracy to varying degrees, but all of them shared equally in the guilt of the murder of President Lincoln.

157

00:20:53,459 --> 00:21:06,453

Stanton, when he issued his order on May 6th, charging the formation of the Military Commission, had used the phrase that the Commission was to remove the stain of innocent blood from the land.

158

00:21:06,453 --> 00:21:12,451

And I think in fact that's what the final sentencing was doing.

159

00:21:12,451 --> 00:21:21,447

Were the right people brought to trial? Could others have conspired to kill Abraham Lincoln?

160

00:21:22,447 --> 00:21:29,444

John Wilkes Booth pulled the trigger in the assassination of Lincoln. There was a conspiracy involved.

161

00:21:29,444 --> 00:21:36,441

Some of the details of that conspiracy may for all time remain cloaked in mystery.

162

00:21:37,441 --> 00:21:49,436

Coming up next in search of continues with a probe into evidence that there may have been two Lee Harvey Oz walls.

163

00:21:49,436 --> 00:21:58,433

Then 20th century with Mike Wallace reports on great rescues, including the dramatic daylight rescue of a U.S. Air Force pilot shot down in Bosnia.

164

00:21:58,433 --> 00:22:04,430

And later tonight, Histories Mysteries looks for 21 tons of gold bullion with high-tech treasure hunters.

165

00:22:04,430 --> 00:22:08,429

At 8, here on the History Channel, where the past comes alive.