

Dr. Samuel Mudd at Fort Jefferson

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The trial was over and the verdicts had been rendered on seven men and one woman, all accused of conspiring to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln.¹ On July 5, 1865, President Andrew Johnson approved his military commission's sentences on the now convicted men and woman. Four were to be executed, with the hangings carried out two days later; four were to be imprisoned at the penitentiary in Albany, New York, which at the time served as the District of Columbia's overflow jail.² Those to be imprisoned, Samuel Arnold,



Samuel Alexander Mudd, 1833-1883, a Maryland tobacco farmer and physician, was convicted of aiding in murder after-the-fact for his part in knowingly sheltering John Wilkes Booth after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Sentenced to life imprisonment at Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas, Florida, Mudd arrived there in July 1865. (Courtesy National Library of Medicine)

Michael O'Loughlen, and Samuel Mudd, were sentenced to life imprisonment at hard labor; Edman Spangler, to six years. Ten days later, Johnson switched the prisoners' place of incarceration to Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas, Florida.³

For more than a century scholars, journalists, writers, and hobbyists have studied the trial and much consensus has been achieved.⁴ Was it overseen by a jury of military officers still reporting to the secretary of war, lacking clear charges initially, and not allowing the accused to testify? Yes. Was the trial unfair? Not really, it was standard practice for the accused not to testify, and the investigation and trial, although quickly begun, were both thorough and accommodating to the very able defense counsels. Was there a predetermined outcome meant to appease a mourning nation and temper further disruptive plans of unregenerate Confederates? No doubt.

Likely, someone had to hang to heal the nation; but the commission proved discerning, handing out different sentences among the accused. Was the trial illegal? Later the Supreme Court found such military trials illegal in a city in which civil courts were functioning. But this was not so clear at the time. The military's commander in chief had been murdered and Secretary of War William Stanton was not about to trust the outcomes of a trial to a civilian jury drawn from Southern-leaning Washington, D.C. Was the imprisonment of civilians in a military prison inappropriate? It was not unheard of during the war. But Johnson's shifting of the imprisonment site to a military prison was quite deliberate; it was meant to ensure that no civilian court could

free the prisoners. Indeed, Mudd's lawyers had planned to do just that once he had arrived in New York.⁵ Despite the prisoners' continued complaining, which will be described below, none of this would matter during the next four years of their incarceration.

At 1 a.m. the second night after Johnson's revised order, the prisoners were hurried from their cells at Washington's Arsenal to a waiting Army steamer and an hour later were on the Potomac River heading to Fortress Monroe, Virginia, where they were quickly transferred to the steamer USS *Florida*; by night they were out in the Atlantic fettered by shackles deep in the hold of a southbound Naval vessel.

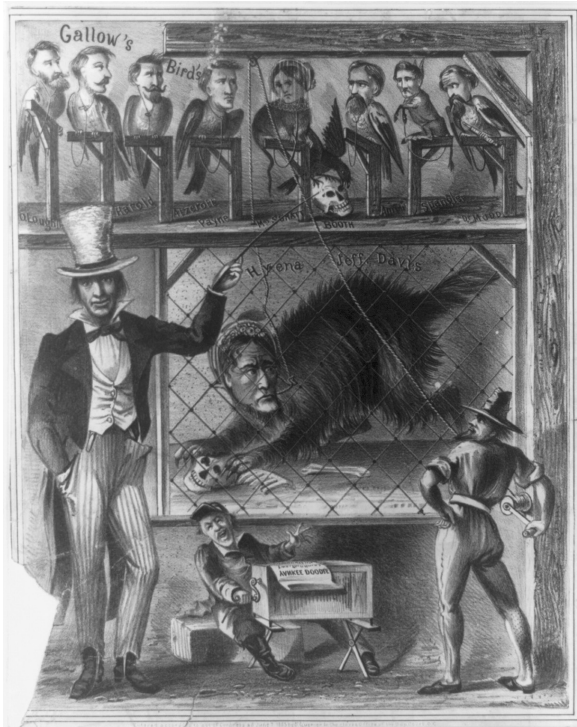
Few knew. Even the Navy ship's captain was unaware; he sailed under sealed orders entrusted to an Army general. The prisoners were informed at sea; their families and the public were informed via press coverage on July 19, 1865. Fort Jefferson was about to receive its most famous prisoners, the Lincoln conspirators.⁶

The Conspirators

Difficulties with the appropriateness of the trial do not necessarily reflect poorly on the decisions of the commission. After years of controversy, there is consensus, although not unanimity, about the guilt of the men charged and not hanged.⁷ Spangler, carpenter and stagehand, did nothing more than make sure John Wilkes Booth's horse was tended to. Off duty from the theater where he also slept, Spangler

was employed by Booth to take care of his stabled horses; tending to them was just something he did. His light sentence reflected his limited role.⁸

Arnold, O’Loughlen, and Mudd were guilty of previously conspiring with Booth in unsuccessful plans to kidnap



The eight individuals convicted of participating in the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, known popularly as “The Conspirators,” are shown in this illustration. Samuel Mudd is on the right, without a noose around his neck as he was spared the death sentence by a single vote on the military jury. He was joined in prison at the fort by Ned Spangler, Samuel Arnold, and Michael O’Loughlen. (Courtesy Library of Congress)

Lincoln, although there is no evidence that they knew of Booth changing his plan from kidnapping to assassination. But in escaping, Booth followed the route planned for the kidnapping. Mudd knew about the escape route; he had helped Booth reconnoiter it.⁹

Mudd is mostly known to posterity as a poor and unlucky country doctor.¹⁰ In fact, both his and his wife's family owned considerable land in Confederate-sympathizing southern Maryland's Charles County. Before the Civil War, his father's assets in today's money made his family millionaires. Mudd and his wife, Sarah Frances (Dyer), known as Frankie or Frank, had started farming in 1859 on 218 acres of land provided by Mudd's father – although still owned by him – on the farm where he had grown up and adjacent to the farm where Sarah had grown up. The Mudds and the Dyers were wealthy and locally prominent Confederate sympathizers.

And they were slave owners. The Mudd family farms, as of 1860, were being worked by 145 enslaved persons, five of whom were assigned to Samuel's farm. At its peak, he and Sarah's farm is documented to have been worked by at least thirteen slaves. There is testimony from a slave Mudd shot in the leg for having a bad attitude, and from a slave who said Sarah whipped her. In 1863 alone, forty slaves ran away from the Mudd and Dyer farms; others followed.¹¹ Nearly all the Mudd family assets beyond land and buildings were tied up in enslaved persons. Slave labor provided their income and social standing. Mudd was steaming to Fort Jefferson only eight months after his family's remaining slaves had been freed by the citizens of the state of Maryland. The loss of these

enslaved workers was financially devastating to the tobacco farming Mudds. In a flash of emancipation they were no longer millionaires, and most of the Mudd family did not look kindly toward Lincoln.

Previously, Mudd's family's wealth and position had brought him and his brothers release from conscription during the war and for Samuel an education, which continued even after his expulsion from Georgetown College for challenging authority – a personality trait that seems core to his character.¹² He apprenticed in medicine under his second cousin, Dr. George Mudd, followed by enrollment in the University of Maryland Medical Department.¹³ Samuel was indeed a doctor living in the country, but his medical practice was minor. He was also a tobacco farmer from a formerly rich, influential, slave-holding family, now economically wrecked by emancipation.

Mudd is known to posterity, also, of being guilty only of performing his professional duty toward an unknown stranger. But, it turns out, Booth was far from being a stranger to Mudd. Near the time of the assassination, Mudd was conspiring with Booth to kidnap the president.¹⁴ He knew Booth, met with him at church, had him overnight in his home, secured purchase of local horses, discussed escape routes, and met Booth by appointment in Washington, D.C., before the assassination. Booth visited Charles County to familiarize himself with an escape route following the Confederate spy trail that passed near Mudd's property. Mudd also stated that he had discussed selling his farm to Booth, likely a cover for the meetings, but indicative of the extent of their prior engagement. Six hours

after the assassination, Booth, wounded, went off the planned escape route to go to Mudd's house. Mudd announced him to his household staff as an honored guest.

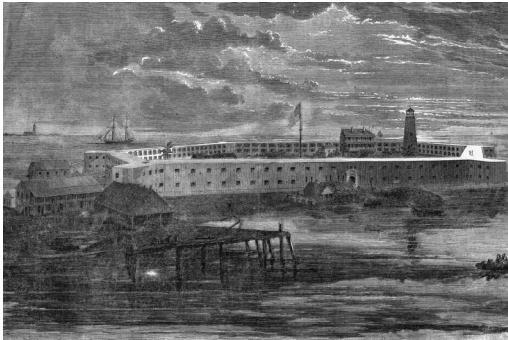
Mudd's argument of professional duty to offer medical treatment is also a bit suspect. It is well known that he treated Booth for a broken leg, an injury often referred to as affecting his ankle. Generally portrayed as an immobilizing injury, it was a fractured fibula, the tiny bone running down the main lower leg bone, the tibia, an injury that – according to Mudd's cousin and medical mentor, George Mudd – did not need treatment.¹⁵ Medically there was little reason for Booth to stop for attention. There was certainly no medical reason for a man with a broken fibula to spend a night and a day recovering in Mudd's upstairs rooms while Federal troops scoured the nearby countryside for him. With Booth ensconced in his house, Mudd rode to town with Booth's companion, David Harold, to find a wagon so Booth's leg would be more comfortable than it would be on a horse during his further pending escape.

Mudd lied. Even before Booth left, Mudd began to set up alternative storylines.¹⁶ Details aside, he lied repeatedly to the pursuing military authorities and others – including his family and neighbors – the lies iteratively becoming conflated and discernable. It was his lies that turned him from a witness into a suspect. His conviction by the commission was for being an accessory-after-the-fact to the murder whose actions furthered the conspiracy. It was his lies that convinced the jurors of his guilt. The Mudd heading to Fort Jefferson was not a poor, innocent, unjustly convicted, simple country

doctor, but rather a convict who had plotted with the eventual assassin to kidnap the president of the United States and then knowingly helped him escape after the murder.

Fort Jefferson

Fort Jefferson was designed to house one thousand soldiers, produce withering cannon fire upon attacking ships, and be defensible for a year's siege.¹⁷ It was, along with Fort Taylor in Key West, a critical asset during the Civil War's early years, deep in the South yet remaining under Union control.¹⁸ At the beginning of the conflict, the fort was only partially constructed, sparsely staffed and armed, and unprepared for its own defense. But it was quickly boarded up, garrisoned, armed, made ready for war, and retained for the Union. Construction continued throughout the war and after under



Fort Jefferson, Dry Tortugas, as illustrated in *Harper's Weekly*, in 1861 early in the Civil War, misleadingly shows a fully completed fort. The fort remained in

Union hands throughout the conflict and served as a prison for Union soldiers convicted of various offenses. In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln changed the punishment for desertion from death to imprisonment on the Dry Tortugas, further increasing the prisoner population there. (Courtesy Monroe County Public Library)

the direction of the Corps of Engineers, while its defenses were assigned to the regular Army. The Southern Blockade was headquartered nearby in Key West. As the war went on, real or perceived threats to the fort diminished and its functions evolved.

Initially, the fort's construction had been done by paid civilian craftsmen and laborers, mostly recent immigrants, and by locally sourced slaves that the government rented from their owners.¹⁹ The war ended the supply of young civilian workers and emancipation ended the use of enslaved persons, who, now freedmen, had no interest in working at the fort. To make up for the labor shortage and relieve other facilities filling up with Confederate prisoners, the fort was turned into a prison for Northern soldiers.

Lincoln changed the penalty for desertion from execution to imprisonment on the Dry Tortugas, clearly perceived to be a fate not quite worse than death. So the inmates were almost entirely Union soldiers convicted of various offenses from minor infractions to serious crimes and also of trumped-up charges. By November 1864, the prison population had swelled to 882 prisoners tended by 583 soldiers sharing the fort with an unrecorded number of civilians.²⁰ It was crowded. After the war's end, a few notorious civilian prisoners, such as the Lincoln conspirators, were added.

Fort Jefferson and the Dry Tortugas at this time were a little town incorporating the fort, brick structures within the fort, and many temporary wooden buildings inside and outside the fort.²¹ Two harbors surrounded the fort on Garden Key;

nearby islands such as Bird, Sand, and Loggerhead Keys were used for various purposes at various times. The population included soldiers, regular Army officers, engineer officers, medical personnel, families of officers and some spouses of enlisted men, civilian workers, prisoners, slaves, the Garden Key lighthouse keeper and his family and personal slaves, a store keeper, and visiting personnel from military and civilian vessels.

When the convicted conspirators arrived, the fort was staffed by the 101 New York Volunteer Infantry, which had arrived in March of 1864, a full regiment of more than 600 soldiers.²² During the conspirators' stay at the fort, Army units came and went. After the war ended, the ranks of the prisoners were drawn down quickly through paroles, pardons, and discharges, as many were being held only for the "duration of the war." By the beginning of 1867, just 56 prisoners remained. During much of the conspirators' stay, the fort saw its population diminish quickly and overcrowding was no longer an issue.

The Arrival

Mudd was heading to life imprisonment on a speck of land more than one hundred miles from mainland Florida, closer to Havana. He knew little about it. Fort Jefferson is seventy miles by sea from Key West, which itself was then accessible only by sea. On the trip, the conspirators were accompanied by a general, a colonel, a captain, a doctor, twenty-three soldiers, and the Navy ship's crew. The government was taking no chances of their escaping or being rescued by remnant Confederate sympathizers as they coasted the Southern states.

While on board, Mudd confided that critical testimony against him at the trial was correct, a crucial admission that he later denied making.²³ The USS *Florida* arrived at the fort on July 24. Only a bit more than three months had passed since the assassination, only nine days since Johnson redirected the conspirators to Fort Jefferson, and only a week since leaving Washington, D.C. Given the compressed schedule and secrecy, the fort commander apparently had no idea they were coming, and they arrived with no special orders. So, the commander gave them the usual introductory instructions and placed them under the same terms as other prisoners.

Discipline at the fort was 1800s military style. Capital punishment was authorized. Most punishment was corporal, such as solitary confinement, extra duty, being shackled, carrying around cannon balls, dunking, being tied to a scaffold, or solitary confinement in the “dungeon.” The conspirators often told of being threatened with the dungeon in their orientation interview. This was all standard procedure, including the dungeon threat, carried out in the open, and applicable to both soldiers and prisoners. It seems that the civilians never chose to appreciate that nuance. Before the arrival of the conspirators, there was no public view of Fort Jefferson as being notorious, something that was soon to change with their incarceration there and their media savviness.

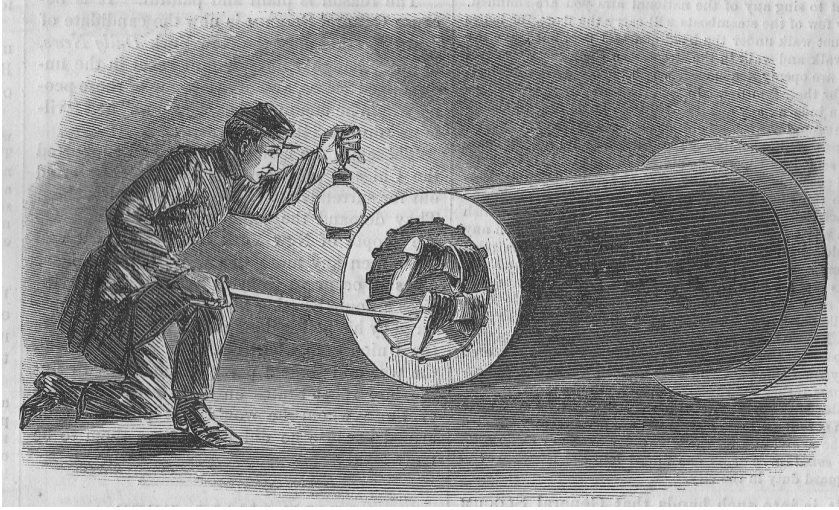
Like the other prisoners, the conspirators were assigned labor according to their skills. Spangler took his talents to the carpentry shop, where over time he became a well-liked personality and prison entrepreneur. Arnold, who

came from a prosperous Baltimore family and had attended college, was made clerk in the command office, where he initially prospered from his close associations with the fort commander. The uneducated O'Loughlen was made a laborer. Mudd, the physician, was assigned as a nurse in the hospital under Dr. Joseph Holder, who put him in the dispensary.²⁴

Other than O'Loughlen, initially the required hard labor of their sentences was not all that hard, especially considering the men were regarded by the nation and their military authorities as having conspired to kill the president. Like other prisoners, they were put out during the day to their work assignments, had time to do other things, and returned to their cell at night. There was minimal oversight needed within the huge fort on a small isolated island. Most cells had no doors, locks, or special guards. This was a much-improved situation over what the conspirators had to endure before and during the trial. But this relatively copacetic situation was soon to change for all of the conspirators, thanks to Mudd.

An Aborted Escape

Two months after his arrival, Mudd tried to escape Fort Jefferson. The troops assigned to the fort had changed twice since the 101 New York had departed and procedures became disorganized. Mudd took advantage. He hid aboard a departing supply ship under the floorboards in the hold, but he was soon missed and the boat was searched. Mudd surrendered when a soldier approached while jamming his sabre through the floorboard cracks. Fort commander Major George E. Wentworth duly documented and reported the attempt and capture.²⁵



Samuel Mudd attempted to escape Fort Jefferson two months after his arrival as the “colored” troops he despised took over control of the fort and its prisoners. Missing prisoner roll call, he was quickly captured hiding under a supply ship’s floorboards rather than in a nonexistent cannon, as depicted in this image from *Harper’s Magazine*. (Courtesy Kushlan Hines Collection)

The incident served to enhance the public’s special interest in Mudd over that of the other living convicted conspirators. His escape attempt became front-page news. Apparently Mudd felt that the commander’s factual report needed some editing for public consumption. In a letter to his brother-in-law Jeremiah Dyer, meant for publication, Mudd spun the story to be that he never made it to the hold because he was so well known: “I would have succeeded, only for meeting a party aboard who knew me, before I could arrive at my hiding-place.”²⁶ This was, of course, a lie.

Harper's Magazine ran an account of the attempt including a drawing, purportedly by a passenger, of Mudd being found cleverly hidden in a cannon.²⁷ There were no man-hiding cannons aboard this supply ship. Hiding in a cannon or not having the chance to hide at all were stories that put Mudd in a better light than did his being hidden under the floor and popping out so as not to be impaled. His absence was missed not because he was well known, but because it was standard practice that prisoners were mustered and accounted for before ships were cleared to leave; Mudd missed the standard roll call.

It was clear to prison authorities that Mudd must have had help to get out of the fort, enter the ship, and hide under the planks. Upon questioning by the fort commander, Mudd quickly gave up the name of his accomplice – whom he had bribed – who was then arrested.²⁸ Mudd repeatedly tried to change this part of his story: He said it was a slip of tongue; that the accomplice accused him; that the accomplice had not secreted him; that he (Mudd) was being threatened with death if he did not give up the name. None of this comports with the fort commander's straightforward report.

Mudd immediately followed his escape attempt with a groveling letter to the commander seeking his sympathy and rationalizing his action. "I assure you it was more from the impulse of the moment & with the hope of speedily seeing my disconsolate wife & four little infants," he wrote. "Before I was detected I had made up my mind to return if I could do so without being observed by the guards. ... I am truly ashamed of my conduct."²⁹ While his multiple infants may have been

compelling, he hid from the commander the real reason for his attempt – the fort was being transferred to the 82nd U.S. Colored Troops. The white soldiers were departing the fort and formerly enslaved persons were arriving to take charge.

To his brother-in-law, Mudd wrote: “Could the world know to what a degraded condition the prisoners of this place have been reduced recently, they, instead of censure, would give me credit for making the attempt [to escape]. This place is now wholly guarded by negro troops with the exception of the few white officers.”³⁰ In writing to his wife, he was even more blunt: “... it is bad enough to be a prisoner in the hands of white men, your equals under the Constitution, but to be lorded over by a set of ignorant, prejudiced and irresponsible beings of the unbleached humanity, was more than I could submit to.”³¹ Mudd, scant months removed from his slaves being emancipated, could not abide being controlled by the 82nd Colored Troops. He expected the world would certainly agree that being guarded by “unbleached” inferiors was a justifiable reason for him to escape.

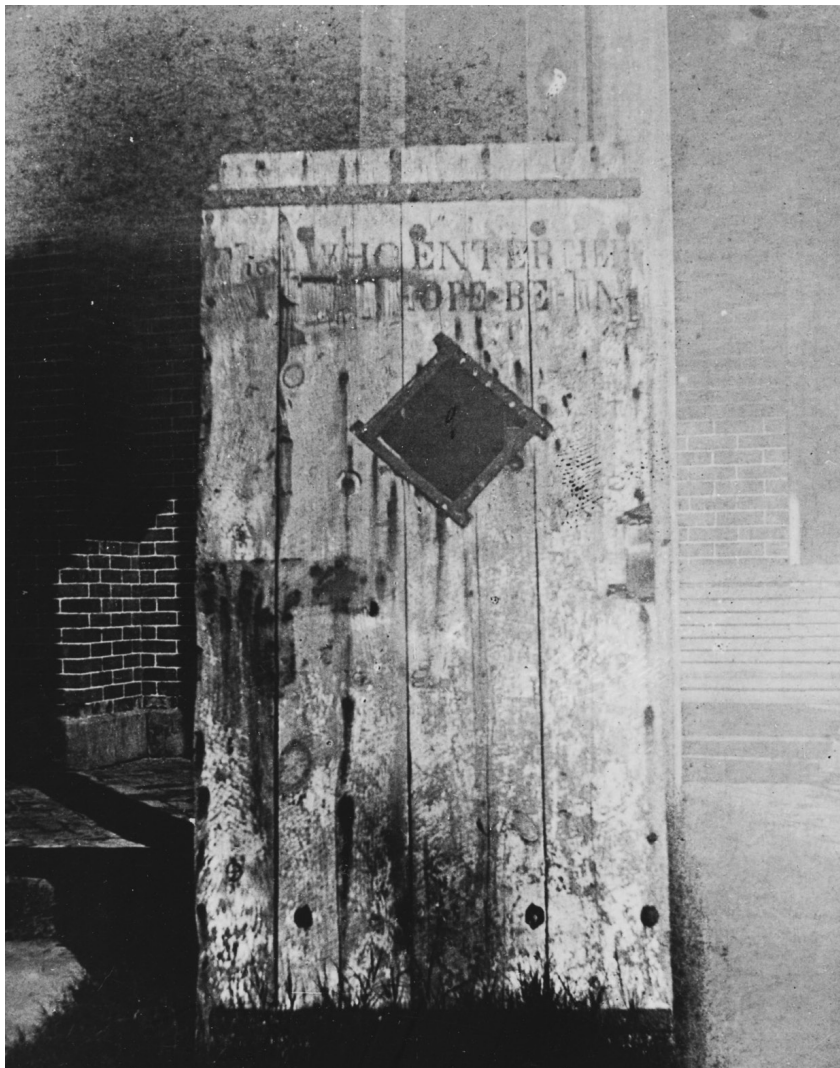
New Rules

Mudd might have anticipated that the rules of his incarceration would change after his excursion. They did, and he didn't like it.³² Some of these rules derived from an inspection of the prison's capacity to secure the conspirators that was underway as he planned his escape. Other of the immediate changes were explicit responses to his mode of escape, providing punishment for his trying, or ensuring he did not have an opportunity to try it again. After his attempt Mudd was moved to a small cell and put in chains. Starting a

few days later, he was released for day work but had to return to his cell each night. He had to be in the cell when ships were leaving. And he was assigned hard labor under guard.

The escape attempt triggered another inspection, by John Newton and J. W. Forsythe, brigadier generals who gave specific orders for the security of the state prisoners (as the conspirators were called), which in addition to the conspirators would include Colonel George St. Leger Grenfell, a prisoner even more colorful than Mudd.³³ Mudd was to be allowed possession of no more than three dollars at a time because the commander had discovered that he was offering people money to do favors for him, such as the money he had paid for help in escaping. The rest of the money was held by the command. The commander was given full authority over the mail to monitor plotting; the state prisoners were confined within the fort; they were to be under guard in their cell; and when out they were to be under guard in irons.³⁴ These new rules applied not only to failed escapee Mudd, but to Arnold, Spangler, and O'Loughlen, who had not tried to escape, and the newly arrived Grenfell.

By November, command of the fort was upgraded to a brigadier general. Mudd remarked: "Four companies of heavy artillery arrived to relieve the detested and abominable negro regiment."³⁵ The government was taking confinement of the conspirators seriously. Despite the lack of threat to the fort and declining numbers of prisoners, a full battalion of troops was now in place, mostly no doubt because of Mudd and the other state prisoners.



After his unsuccessful escape attempt, Samuel Mudd and the other conspirators for a time were confined in isolation to a secure room in the fort nicknamed the “dungeon.” This image is of the door long ascribed to the room. The conspirators spent most of their years in a room fashioned out of a casement, as other prisoners and soldiers also occupied. (Courtesy National Park Service)

Accommodations

Mudd occupied five quarters during his time at Fort Jefferson. The conspirators' first cell was ordinary, the same as soldiers and other prisoners: a casement, or gun room, temporarily partitioned off, without doors. Mudd soon removed himself to a cot in Holders' hospital outside the fort and was, consequently, even more at liberty than most prisoners. After the escape attempt Mudd was confined in a small gun room off the sally port at the fort's entrance. Following the inspectors' report, Mudd was moved to the dungeon.

Mudd was not alone. Thanks to him, the other state prisoners were moved there too. They remained in the dungeon cell for four months under continuous guard. It was not a real dungeon, as the fort perched barely above sea level and had no basement other than below sea-level cisterns, but a cell on the first floor secured by an impressive door with a small window.³⁶ It was named the dungeon for the deterrent value the word offered to each incoming prisoner. Guards were posted outside the room. The cell has been a tourist attraction since soon after Mudd's departure.³⁷ Its door and inscription from Dante's *Inferno* were kept intact for visitors even during the long decades when the rest of the fort was left to disintegrate.³⁸ It's actually not so clear when the inscription was made, but Mudd's "dungeon" remains one of Key West's popular tourist attractions.

In January 1866, the conspirators were returned to more normal quarters, which they shared.³⁹ This move followed complaints lodged by Mudd through his wife to Johnson.⁴⁰ The guards remained, but the prisoners' casemate was

slightly different from the others. Instead of two frame side walls, one was brick, part of the heavily reinforced sally port. Additionally, because of the room's position over the drawbridge, its outer wall had three gun ports far too narrow to squeeze through, rather than a large unfinished opening for cannon that characterized other converted casements. Like the other casemate quarters, the cell opened fully onto the parade ground on the fort's interior until it was boarded over in 1868. The conspirators spent the rest of their prison time assigned to this cell.

This cell also elicited complaints from Mudd. He grouched that it had limited airflow. Being over the only entrance to the fort, it was where everyone passed coming and going, disturbing his sleep. The guards below called the hours through the night. This was in addition to the regular rounds of bugles and guns that measured the passing of day and night in an Army camp, sounds which emanated from the vicinity of the sally port and its rooftop flagpole. To Mudd's displeasure, the noises, smoke, and lighthouse's spotlight also afflicted the open-walled room. But he complained too when the inner wall was boarded up.

The cell leaked, but then so did most of the fort's second tier where their accommodations were located. The roof above was a terreplein made of shell and sand designed to capture rainwater and direct it to the underground cisterns. It did leak. One of the fort's more interesting features today is the stalactites hanging from its beautiful arches, formed by more than a century of water oozing through the carbonate-rich beach-sand roof and the beach-sand mortar. The conspirators'

cell may have leaked more than most, as it was part of the sally port support wall. They dealt with periodic drippings by etching out little trenches that led to a small hollowed-out depression from which trapped water was sponged up. The excavations can be seen today. To solve the dampness problem for the prisoners, the fort soon installed a wooden floor for them.

Food

Mudd was a critic of the cuisine offered at the fort. One month after his arrival, he told his wife that his “principal diet is coffee, butter and bread, three times a day. We have had a mess or two of Irish potatoes and onions, but as a general thing vegetables don’t last many days in this climate before decomposition takes place. Pork and beef are poisonous to me; and the molasses when am (sic) able to buy it, and occasionally fish, when Providence favored, are the only articles of diet used. I am enjoying very good health, considering the circumstances.”⁴¹

Mudd professed that from this point on he did not eat meat by choice, thereby forgoing protein in his diet. Arnold later wrote of this early period: “The rations issued at this time were putrid, unfit to eat, and during these months of confinement I lived upon a cup of slop coffee and the dry, hard crust of bread.”⁴² The conspirators particularly disliked their coffee. Arnold continued, “Coffee was brought over to our quarters in a dirty, greasy bucket, always with grease swimming on its surface; bread, rotten fish and meat, all mixed together, and thus we were forced to live for months, until starvation nearly stared us in the face.” Arnold was a major complainer

who saw conspiracies everywhere and he wrote about them decades after the fact but the situation no doubt was true. It is quite likely that the conspirators at the time of their dungeon stay were being quietly harassed by the freedmen soldiers in charge during this brief period.

Given the vehemence with which Mudd and Arnold complained about the food, it is of some value to separate out their complaints from the reality throughout their confinement. And to do this we need to distinguish between the situation during the war from that occurring afterward, when the conspirators were in residence. There is no doubt that during the war, the food situation at the fort could be atrocious; it was a situation endured uniformly by all eating out of the common stores. The logistics of supplying the multiple hundreds of inhabitants of the fort was difficult under the best of circumstances and far more so during the early years of the war. Added to the fort's inherent logistical problems owing to its isolation was that its supply routes were compromised by the war. Additionally, there were competing military priorities for available supplies. A shipment of supplies was scheduled to arrive twice monthly from New Orleans. Supplies also could be obtained directly from Havana or Key West but at significant cost to the military, or individually to personnel and civilians with money.

Correspondence and articles written by soldiers and the accounts of civilians who were at the fort during the war provide ample examples of how bad the food could be.⁴³ The bread was considered inedible, even though the fort had a fine bakery, which can still be seen today. And it was infested

with beetles. Water from the cisterns and open water barrels had “wrigglers” swimming about. Storage of perishable food, including essential flour, was nearly impossible in the fort’s humid climate. Much of it was bad by the time it arrived from New Orleans.

These supplies came to New Orleans from New York, bypassing a direct stop at Key West or the fort itself that could have reduced the number of weeks for food storage. Most of the surviving rations were dried, canned, or salted. But even salt pork and hard tack deteriorated into inedibility. Pigs and cattle were delivered intermittently and stabled on outlying islands, but northern Florida range cattle, scrawny to begin with, fared poorly on a diet of salty beach vegetation. A typical menu in 1863 was boiled beef for breakfast, bean soup for lunch, and salt pork for supper. Toward the end of the war, Holder’s wife, Emily, found a potato to be a treat and to be invited to dine on a ship at anchor even more of one.⁴⁴

Troops and prisoners were indeed malnourished during the war. Holder, when sent to look in on soldiers, who at that time were not his responsibility, found a prevalence of scurvy. Unlike mariners, who had been dealing with scurvy for centuries, the Army stuck on an island was seemingly unaware of what caused this condition. Holder treated the situation with what fruit and vegetables he could muster. Eventually he found that local dune plants served with vinegar were efficacious, and he secured funds to buy limes and other produce from Key West by establishing and charging admission for theater shows.⁴⁵

During the war, some took the food issue on as a challenge. Soldiers gained permission to fish for the fort stores. Sea turtles (after all, the islands were named Tortugas) were captured and secured in the fort's moat until butchered. In season, turtle eggs and seabird eggs were collected for food. Coconuts drifting by were snagged. A small garden in imported soil and of indifferent production was maintained within the fort (on Garden Key), at times under the charge of Grenfell or Mudd. Beyond the supply ships, extra food was brought in from Key West and Havana; civilians and officers could travel to Key West, then Fort Jefferson's command headquarters, and pick up supplies for their families. To the extent supplies were available, anyone with money could make purchases at the civilian store, called the sutler, located adjacent to the fort. Soldiers ran accounts at the store between paydays. Prisoners with money also could buy provisions there.

As the war progressed and the potential for hostile activities abated in the Gulf, supplies to the fort increased and even more so after the war, at which time the number of people needing to be fed at the fort was decreasing rapidly. The quality and quantity of the food available improved markedly. The dietary conditions experienced during the war became widely known; but, during all except the earliest months of the conspirators time at Fort Jefferson, food shortages were a thing of the past.

Prisoners of means and connections were better off than most of the fort's other inhabitants. They could receive money to buy food and also receive food directly. Mudd received both, mostly from his brother-in-law Tom Dyer, a merchant in

New Orleans. He writes, "I received a trunk from dear Tom on the 3rd of December, invoiced as containing a quantity of fine clothes, several cans of vegetables, fish, whiskey, etc. The whiskey was not received."⁴⁶ A similar package was sent the following May.⁴⁷ Dyer writes, "I have sent a box containing canned fruits, etc., also enclosed thirty dollars. Anything you need that authorities will permit, inform me and I will forward to you." Mudd once requested Dyer send supplies instead of money because what was available was so costly. Mudd had much better food than his complaints intended to convey.

Mudd's complaint that he found the available meat repulsive was written in the very early days of his stay. However, this became a long-term narrative; he often is described as a vegetarian during his prison term. But even in his initial pronouncement, he noted that he was prepared to eat fish; two years later he was not at all vegetarian but enjoyed a varied diet. He wrote to his wife, "Our diet consists principally of salt pork, bread and coffee – fresh beef two or three times in every ten days. We had issued yesterday to us, eight in number, about a peck of Irish potatoes, the first vegetable of a kind since last January, with the exception of corn and beans occasionally."⁴⁸

He supplied a longer dietary list in 1867 that enthusiastically shows how satisfactory the food situation had become: "We have pretty constantly on hand Irish potatoes, yams, or sweet potatoes, onions, ham and butter. ... We have received lately a very fine barrel of potatoes from Mr. Ford, also one from an unknown party, with splendid ham." Mudd then added, toning down his enthusiasm, the disclaimer that, "I have little

appetite for such things ..., without the same degree of liberty, freedom of speech, etc., but little enjoyment is realized.”⁴⁹ Thus, Mudd made clear that he had good and abundant food but this he felt was not enough to compensate for his situation, nor did it serve his arguments that he was being mistreated. He likely was not so distraught as not to eat it.

The best example of the dichotomy between the actual and reported food situation may be understood from correspondence in 1865. As a result of Mudd’s letters to her, his wife added “poor food” to a letter listing Mudd’s complaints that she sent to Johnson on December 22. She wrote, “The food furnished is of such miserable quality, he finds it impossible to eat it. Health and strength are failing.”⁵⁰ Meanwhile, quite literally, Mudd was writing to her the very next day that, “We have our Christmas dinner already in prospect: canned roast turkey, oysters, preserves, fresh peaches, tomatoes, etc.” By the five-month anniversary of Mudd’s arrival at the fort there was clearly no serious problem with the food supplies, his continued complaints to be forwarded to the president and newspapers notwithstanding.

Environmental Conditions

While Mudd would eventually complain about environmental conditions at the fort, early on he wrote, “Whenever there is a breeze, which is generally the case, it is always pleasant. A strict eye is kept to the cleanliness of the place, and being remote from the main land we have no fears of any infectious or epidemic disease.”⁵¹ He contrasted the climatic conditions at the fort positively to the fair winter back in Maryland. His was an accurate report of the idyllic environment of the fort

for much of the year. Warm tropical waters, coral reefs, crystal white sand flats, sand-beached islands, and abundant fish and other sea life are part of the reason why Dry Tortugas is today a national park.



During the war, the fort could be an unhealthy place. Problems with sanitation were pervasive. The moat, expected to be the fort's sewer, did not work. This image shows the moat's inflow and outflow. At the peak of the war, hundreds of people were crammed into a tight space and many became ill. (Courtesy National Park Service)

But years earlier during the war, Fort Jefferson was – at times and in some seasons – a difficult and unhealthy place.⁵² However, it always had adequate medical care. For much of the war, Dr. John Bell was responsible for the soldiers from a hospital within the fort, while Holder was responsible for the engineers and their workers, including prisoners and

enslaved persons, from his hospital outside the fort. Holder, although a civilian, later took on regular Army responsibility as well and served as the health officer for the fort.⁵³ In 1866, Holder was replaced by Dr. Joseph Sim Smith.

During the war, many people were crammed into the fort's limited space. At any time a large portion of the soldiers and even more so the prisoners were too sick or weak to work, which was regularly documented by the command. Personnel were most susceptible to disease and other illness during the hot, wet, summer months, called the "sick season." During the winter, temperatures ameliorated and the climate was drier. Early in the fort's construction phase, civilian contract workers from the North labored in the winter but left during the summer, which was a reason slaves were brought in who could be compelled to work through the sick season.

The fort's tall exterior walls inhibited airflow and the interior walls functioned like a pizza oven, heating the interior parade ground. The Union Army knew nothing about operations in a tropical environment. Soldiers were made to drill in the midday sun in full woolen uniforms. Workers labored through the heat and humidity. Eye afflictions due to the bright light were common. Contagious diseases, especially intestinal infections, were commonplace and persistent, weakening the victims to other stresses. Smallpox and dengue fever breakouts occurred. Soldiers and prisoners died and were buried on nearby islands.⁵⁴ Letters written by soldiers to family members are full of accounts of their own illnesses, those of others, and the deaths of fellow soldiers.

For half the year there was little rainfall and for the other half there was sometimes too much. A hurricane hit the fort in 1865, collapsing buildings, blowing out wood casement walls, toppling parade ground trees, sinking the fort's supply vessel, blowing a cannon off the roof, and killing people.⁵⁵ It is a puzzle that Mudd failed to mention the storm in existing correspondence. Fleas and bed bugs harassed the inhabitants. Ships brought in rats; cats were introduced to control them. Both brought fleas that then inflicted the residents. In each rainy season, mosquitoes joined the pest brigade. Mudd complained that clothes sent him were not mosquito proof. No one knew then that the mosquitos were more than an annoyance, but a public health threat transmitting dengue fever that was endemic in the fort, and later yellow fever once it arrived. The mosquitoes bred in uncovered cisterns, water barrels, and any other water left about. Their larvae were the "wigglers" much remarked upon in the drinking water.

Sanitation was one of the great failures of the fort. The latrines, unless clogged, drained into the moat. The moat was designed to allow the tides to flush it out. It did not work. Likely engineers familiar with the northern Atlantic were unfamiliar with the miniscule one- to two-foot tides at the Dry Tortugas. The soldiers, in numbers well in excess of the facilities, often did not bother with the toilets but relieved themselves directly through the fort wall openings into the moat, and tossed garbage out the same way. So, the moat filled with sewage and debris. This was not only unpleasant but scary in that prevailing medical theory was that many sicknesses derived from miasmas emanating from such stagnant conditions. Mudd complained about the unhealthy sulfurous air wafting

up into his cell. When sicknesses prevailed, wall openings were boarded up to stop the vapors, eliminating what airflow there was. Mudd, as part of his duties in the carpentry shop, helped board them up.

During the war, crowded conditions and poor sanitation along with poor nutrition led to the persistence of illness among the soldiers and prisoners. Crowding allowed contagious diseases like measles, chickenpox, smallpox, and – presumably although not diagnosed at the time – flu and colds to spread. Poor sanitation led to dysentery, cholera, and other unidentified diseases characterized by diarrhea and dehydration. Mosquito-borne dengue fever, called break-bone fever, was seasonal and painful but not fatal. However, until 1867, there was no yellow fever at the fort, mainly because of its isolation and the work of Holder as health officer keeping it that way. Dengue fever is transmitted by the same mosquito that transmits yellow fever, but yellow fever never reached the fort during Holder’s tour managing its quarantine processes. As the prison population drew down, crowding and pressure on the sanitation infrastructure declined, nutrition improved, the medical situation normalized, and yellow fever had never been present. This was the health situation the conspirators encountered upon arrival and enjoyed for much of their stay.

Entertainment

Mudd never wrote about there being entertainment at the fort; perhaps such positive activities did not comport with the dismal picture he was painting to aid the case for his release. Indeed, Fort Jefferson was about as isolated as a location could be in America in the 1860s. With multiple hundreds

of people on a speck of land, both leadership and individuals needed to create their own recreation. According to Holder, idleness took a toll on the psyche of the men stationed or imprisoned at the fort. There was not always enough real work for everyone to do and repetitious nineteenth-century marching drills were uninspiring. Holder wrote that in his view, the fort would be better served by the insertion of ministers who could provide counseling, rather than medical doctors such as himself.

But the fort was not without its entertainments and diversions. Games were held, including baseball, a new sport sweeping the nation. Soldiers and prisoners received permission to go fishing, turtling, turtle and seabird eggging, shell and coral collecting, and scientific collecting for Holder's natural history studies. Spangler offered to send home a barrel of coral. Mudd offered to send home shells. Card games and chess were played. Mudd built a cribbage board and was reported to regularly play chess. Crafts were made, mostly to be sent home, including the then popular hobby of making cards embossed with pressed plants. Mudd did this too, apologizing for his poor craftsmanship. Inhabitants watched the fort's activities from the ramparts and open casemate walls. Long strolls were taken around the top of the fort and moat wall. Excursions for picnics were made to the nearby islands. Costume parties and plays were held. The comings and goings of the fort, the tribulations and adventures of its inhabitants, small town and military camp gossip, and news from the war, Key West and Havana provided fodder for conversation. The fort's officers and their families had opportunities for picnics, campouts, dinners, dances, and trips to Key West.

An important source of entertainment was the Théâtre de Hôpital, or Key Lime Theater, created by Holder.⁵⁶ It was a variety show put on by a cast of prisoners and soldiers with him as director. Holder's medical practice was much concerned with mental health; one of the theater's goals was to improve prisoners' and soldiers' states of mind. But he also had a practical purpose. Admission charges went toward buying fruit and vegetables for the fort to ward off scurvy. The theater, built from the boards of an outlying hospital building that Holder deactivated, was well appreciated and attended. The aristocratic Grenfell had a low opinion of the theater's quality and in his critique outed Mudd's participation in it.⁵⁷ Mudd did not mention in his letters that he played his violin at the theater for the entertainment of the soldiers and prisoners; in fact, he never wrote revealing that he had the pleasure of having a violin with him at the fort.

Mudd and other prisoners had access to the fort library. He noted that it was well stocked with more than 500 volumes available for his access.⁵⁸ It also had magazine and newspaper subscriptions. Mudd's fellow conspirators had subscriptions to Maryland newspapers. Mudd encouraged his correspondents to send him additional newspapers and cuttings that mentioned him, which he pored over in his cell for news of himself, public opinion, and the politics of pardons. Reading was clearly one of his primary activities, as was corresponding, discussed below. Mudd also made time for his prayers, saying his rosary daily between infrequent visits by Catholic priests and a bishop. Otherwise, according to his letters, he spent his time in his quarters or at his work assignments.

Life at Hard Labor

Mudd's sentence was to be served at hard labor; it did not work out that way. During his first tour of duty in the hospital he complained to his wife, somewhat surprisingly, that he had little or no labor to perform there.⁵⁹ At this point in his incarceration, his "hard labor" as a convicted presidential assassination conspirator was to distribute medicine prescribed by Holder.



After being removed from hospital work and various menial tasks in 1867, Samuel Mudd was reassigned to the carpentry shop. Pleased with the assignment, he worked there for the rest of his time at the fort. This photograph was taken during his time in the shop. (Courtesy National Park Service)

After Mudd's escape attempt, the fort commander ordered the prisoner to be reassigned to actual hard labor.⁶⁰ He was let out of the dungeon to work six days a week in leg irons and under guard, remaining in the cell on Sundays. He complained that the shackles hurt his legs, the work hurt his shoulders and back, his hair was falling out, and his eyesight was deteriorating. In January 1866, following the complaint

from Mrs. Mudd to Johnson, which secured the release of the conspirators from the dungeon, the shackles were ordered removed.⁶¹

The commander had specifically ordered that Mudd was to be assigned wheelbarrow work, likely one of the more strenuous jobs at the fort. It apparently did not happen. Mudd tends to be viewed as an old and somewhat frail-looking man from the few images available, so such an assignment might seem onerous. But, at the time he was only thirty-one years old. He was assigned to a foreman who instead of putting him behind a wheelbarrow assigned him the task of cleaning bricks for re-use. His attitude to being expected to perform this simple and not overly hard labor assignment is made clear in his letter to one of his brothers-in-law: “I worked hard all day and came very near finishing one brick.”⁶²

It does not appear from his brick-cleaning work that Mudd was going to be very cooperative in performing actual labor. He now considered himself “the veriest of slave” and to have lost control of his own actions being guarded continuously by negro soldiers. At this point he felt his escape attempt would soon be forgotten. In a letter to one of his brothers-in-law, he revealed that he soon expected to be returned to a more suitable job. Apparently, he preferred what he described as having little or no labor to perform back in the hospital to cleaning bricks, but he failed to grasp the seriousness of his action in attempting to escape prison, as well as his incompetence in the hospital, discussed below. He wasn’t going to be allowed back to the hospital any time soon.

Mudd was then assigned the task of sweeping the bastions each day, perhaps due to his lack of production as a brick cleaner. He was to do this under the eye of guards. While this might appear to be make-work, it was not. The bastion stairs and the fort's hallways daily accumulated sand from the terreplein topping the fort walls, blown sand, and clouds of construction dust that, if left unswept, made the narrow, winding, dark, stone steps unsafe. Although Mudd wrote that he finished his daily sweeping job in a couple of hours, other correspondents had gotten the impression from him that, "he is compelled by a Negro guard to sweep the Sally Port continually."⁶³

In February 1867, Mudd was reassigned to the carpentry shop. Likely Spangler helped arrange this appointment so they could work together. Mudd was pleased to be there, especially because the boxes he made from the fort's wood stock sold in Key West for twenty-five cents and he could keep the income. Why a prisoner could have a private business selling boxes made out of government wood is puzzling, but pilfering of government stores was rather commonplace.

Several examples of woodwork attributed to Mudd from this period exist; canes, the cribbage board, and a table are on display at the Mudd House museum. He always receives full credit for these creations. In the same room as the exquisite table is a chest of drawers Mudd made by himself after he had returned home.⁶⁴ The inlaid table is a minor masterpiece of country furniture making; the chest is amateurish, showing that Mudd had achieved at best apprentice status as a furniture maker. The contrast between the prison-made

table and home-made chest, now standing fewer than ten feet apart, suggests that the talented Spangler was responsible for much of the detailed work of the finely crafted Mudd-attributed pieces. After their release, Spangler came to live on the Mudd farm. During his last years at the fort, Mudd clearly cherished the lack of hard labor in the carpentry shop, as suggested by the one image of him from his Fort Jefferson days – it shows him well-dressed and contentedly sitting in a chair in the shop.⁶⁵

Mudd's most famous work assignment was his return to the hospital during the 1867 yellow fever eruption at the fort. However locally infamous it became, the Fort Jefferson yellow fever episode was but a minor part of a widespread epidemic that claimed thousands of lives along the entire Gulf Coast and up the Mississippi Valley. The medical aspects of Mudd's engagements are discussed in the next section; here I will discuss his work. The complex story is important as its narrative became a compelling basis for Mudd's claim to a pardon and his subsequent public rehabilitation. The facts differ substantially from Mudd's accounts.

Although yellow fever raged seasonally in Havana and particularly virulent forms of it appeared in Key West, as noted previously Fort Jefferson did not have an episode throughout the war owing to its isolation and because Holder inspected each arriving vessel and determined its quarantine.⁶⁶ Under Holder, sick people never made it off a boat and into the fort. The quarantine system broke down under his successor, Smith. Once an infected person arrived at the fort, the right mosquitoes were already there to serve as vectors.

The epidemic began in August 1867; the first soldier died on August 22. Smith had a tent hospital erected on nearby Sand Key for isolating patients. That remote hospital site previously had been closed by Holder. Under Smith, ill patients were to be taken from Fort Jefferson to the distant hospital. Smith and his family were early victims of the fever, with Smith taking ill on September 5.

These were the beginnings of Mudd's purported finest hours. The argument made by Mudd, his spokespersons, and petitioners was that he more or less singlehandedly fought the epidemic. As expressed by Johnson in his presidential pardon, "upon the occasion of the prevalence of the Yellow Fever at that military station, and the death by the pestilence of the medical office of the Post, the said Samuel A. Mudd devoted himself to the care and cure of the sick, and interposed his courage and his skill to protect the garrison, otherwise without adequate medical aid..."⁶⁷ Additionally, Mudd and others persistently made the point that when he was in charge no deaths occurred. These claims are at variance with the truth.

In Mudd's account on September 5, after he had procrastinated for some time owing to his being conflicted about helping out, he had decided to offer his services as a doctor, which he was spared from doing because at the same time the commander had decided to have him engage. Whether volunteering or having been assigned, Mudd began doctoring responsibilities after breakfast on September 5. His principal patients were Smith and his wife and child; there is no mention in any writings of other patients. Dr. Daniel Whitehurst, a former

fort surgeon, arrived from Key West at 10 p.m. on September 7. Smith died on September 8, as duly inscribed on his monument in the fort's parade ground.

In a letter to one of his brothers-in-law the same day, September 8, Mudd wrote, "The two days I had the management of the hospital no deaths have occurred, and all have improved that were taken in time."⁶⁸ Parsing the statement reveals its deceptions. It was in these two days that Mudd was unsuccessfully tending to Smith and his wife and son, who clearly did not "improve." Mudd discounted Smith's death as his responsibility as he actually died right after Whitehurst arrived, and so Mudd claimed these deaths did not occur on his watch. Contrary to all of his subsequent statements, Smith and family were dying under Mudd's care and died soon after Whitehurst arrived.

Mudd's tour "in charge" lasted two days. The story became much magnified. By October 1867, his account expanded in writing to his wife that, "... during the intervals, amounting to nearly three weeks, that I had exclusive care of the sick, not one died."⁶⁹ Other accounts repeated Mudd's self-congratulatory story. A letter from Spangler appeared in *The New York Times* on September 22, in which he wrote of Mudd that "we have lost no cases with him yet." The letter is dated September 6, the first day of Mudd's doctoring when his three patients – Smith and family – had indeed not yet died.⁷⁰ It is unlikely that the uneducated Spangler would have had the ability to write a piece suitable for a New York City newspaper. It is far more likely that Mudd wrote of himself

under Spangler's byline. Within one day of being assigned as a doctor, he set up the storyline of there being no deaths attributable to himself.

This story of no deaths under Mudd has persisted through to today. Johnson's pardon language praised Mudd's work after the medical officer of the post died and there being no other adequate medical aid. The president was misled. The previous "medical officer," although incapacitated, had not died, and "other adequate medical help" arrived before he did. There was never a moment when Mudd was in charge after a post doctor had died.

The epidemic went on with Mudd serving as a nurse to Whitehurst. Grenfell, without medical training, similarly was an attending nurse. O'Loughlen became ill and was attended by Mudd in their communal room where he died under Mudd's exclusive care.⁷¹ Mudd himself became ill on October 4, one month after he became involved with patients. He was tended to by Spangler, who was unaffected, and spent six weeks in his room recuperating. By the end of October, with Mudd still staying in his room, the epidemic abated and Whitehurst was replaced by Dr. Edward Thomas, who himself took ill on November 14. Mudd was then reassigned to the hospital where there were now only three patients, all of whom were convalescing. Thomas himself was the last case of the epidemic and he returned to service after recovering.⁷²

There is much noteworthy imbedded in this chronology. Mudd's total time in charge was parts of two days. He alone attended the Smith family, all of whom died. He alone

attended O'Loughlen to his death. His total time in service as an assistant to Whitehurst was a month, from Smith taking ill on September 5 to Mudd taking ill on October 4. Yellow fever symptoms generally last three to four days; those that move into the severe stage can last up to several weeks. There is no commentary that Mudd was ever in a severe stage. Yet he took to his room for six weeks, more than six times what would be expected. There were no new cases to be treated during his third tour of medical duty, which lasted a month. His total time of medical service in the epidemic was one month and another month after it was over. These points become important when considering Mudd's description of his work in the epidemic, discussed in the next section.⁷³

With the epidemic over, Thomas returned Mudd to the carpentry shop, where he worked for the rest of his incarceration save for an occasional detail to the Provost Marshall's office as a clerk.

Medical Practice

Mudd's pardon and his public re-imaging are intimately connected with his medical practice at the fort. As noted above in discussing his medical work there, Mudd's three tenures serving in medical capacities were short, totaling about two months, only one of which was during the active epidemic. Elucidating his medical practice during his incarceration at Fort Jefferson involves the storyline he told, his medical theories and application, and his medical ethics.

Mudd's first medical responsibility was dispensing medicine in Holder's hospital, from which he was dismissed after his

escape attempt. He explains, “I am now thrown out of my job as chief of dispensary, ... I don’t regret the loss of my position. Take away the honor attached, the labor was more confining than any other place or avocation on the island. At the same time, it relieved me of the disagreeable necessity of witnessing men starve for the nutriment essential for a sick man ... Four prisoners died during the short time I had been here; the last one died the morning I made my attempt to escape.”⁷⁴

He thus intimated that the doctor in charge was doing a rather poor job of keeping his patients alive. Yet Holder had a sterling reputation for his doctoring and counseling, as well as for his attention to nutrition that had significantly improved the health of the soldiers and prisoners.⁷⁵ Perhaps Mudd had a reason to downplay the job. His escape attempt had saved Holder, a mild-mannered Quaker, from carrying out a decision he had made – and had informed the commander of – to dismiss Mudd from the hospital. Mudd had dispensed the antithetically wrong medicine to several patients. The men were suffering from diarrhea, but Mudd administered an emetic that almost killed them. The fort commander accused him of attempted murder. Holder argued that Mudd’s actions were not attempted murder but incompetence. Had he not tried to escape, Mudd would have been removed from the hospital anyway. Mudd’s letter fails to mention that his poor dispensing, not Holder’s medical practice, put patients in the hospital at risk. Mudd’s charge that the job was “confining” does not take into account that it was located in near total freedom outside the fort’s walls and that he got to sleep there as well.

Mudd's second medical assignment occurred, as discussed in the last section, when Smith became ill and he served as an assistant to Whitehurst for a month. Mudd made two persistent medical claims for his success during this period: that he closed Smith's distant hospital and that he introduced a new treatment practice, both to the benefit of saving lives at the fort.

Sand Key had been the fort's isolation hospital and graveyard but had been dismantled by Holder as being unnecessary and medically undesirable, as he felt people should be treated in the fort. This tiny speck of an island is now called Hospital Key in recognition of its legacy.⁷⁶ Smith reestablished it. It was never the death trap Mudd made it out to be – only six of the twenty-seven patients died there during the early stages of the epidemic, not half as Mudd repeatedly claimed. The hospital was small, tented, and set among the graves. Mudd argued that it was his idea to close Smith's hospital on the island because the trip was doing patients no good, and that he prevailed upon the commander, Colonel Frederick Stone, to do so. Mudd stated: "Immediately, I discontinued the Sand Key Hospital."⁷⁷ He also claimed he moved unaffected troops off Garden Key. He did neither.

Whitehurst, the physician in charge, reported that he was the one who closed the hospital on September 15 because of logistics and crowded conditions on that island, two weeks after Mudd would have relinquished any such authority, if he ever had it. Smith had started removing well troops off Garden Key and Whitehurst continued the practice; eventually up to two-thirds of the troops were removed from the fort to

Loggerhead Key.⁷⁸ Although Mudd seems to have concurred with the decisions, he neither closed the hospital nor sent off the troops as he claimed.

Whitehurst had vast experience with yellow fever in Key West, where intermittent quarantine was central to disease control. Irrespective of Mudd's not-unreasonable argument that transport was hard on patients, that was not Whitehurst's reasoning; his was logistics. The function of a quarantine hospital was not for patient comfort but a public health response to avoid the sick infecting others. It was easier to send well soldiers away, which proved successful as the vectors were in the fort.

A second aspect of Mudd's medical practice during the epidemic was his treatment protocol. The treatment offered by all the doctors-in-charge at the fort for yellow fever, until the arrival of Thomas after Whitehurst's departure, consisted of such interventions as purging, opioids, mercury, induced vomiting, and herbal tea. Mudd claimed credit for adding bundling, a treatment in which after a steaming bath to elicit profuse sweating, a patient was wrapped in blankets to induce further sweating while water and ice were withheld. He was quite proud of the treatment and insisted it saved lives. It was divergent from accepted medical practice and Mudd campaigned for the medical community to recognize him for his innovation.

Upon his arrival, Thomas documented previous practices and changed them. Thomas' treatment started with a strong cathartic followed by supplemental potassium, water, ice,

nitric acid (which reduced fever, muscle spasms, abdominal pain, and increased urine production), lemonade, and, when a patient was gaining strength, ale.⁷⁹ Yellow fever is incurable once contracted; the only proper treatment is to manage its symptoms, providing support for the body's own recovery as Thomas' protocols did. Mudd's treatments of overheating patients with already elevated body temperature and dehydrating them were far from palliative, and subjected patients to additional stresses. His practices were never accepted by the medical community.

As noted in the previous section, Mudd's third medical assignment came as Thomas became ill. Thomas' protocols, not Mudd's, were in effect for the remaining patients; the three other patients were already recovering. After Thomas no one else contracted yellow fever for Mudd to treat. The epidemic was over.

Mudd's medical ethics compel consideration. He was openly reluctant to take on the care of the sick during the epidemic. On October 27, he wrote a detailed letter to his wife about the epidemic. He began by revealing his state of mind conflating his bitterness with his duty, "... I found myself unprepared to decide between the contending emotions of fear and duty that now pressed to gain ascendancy. ... Tried by a court not ordained by the laws of the land, confronted by suborned and most barefaced perjured testimony, deprived of liberty, banished from home, family and friends, bound in chains as the brute and forced at the point of the bayonet to do the most menial service, and withal denied for time every luxury, and even healthy subsistence, for having exercised a simple

act of common humanity in setting the leg of a man whose insane act I had no sympathy, but which was in the line of my professional calling. It was but natural that resentment and fear should rankle my heart, ... Can I be a passive beholder? Shall I withhold little service ... Or shall I again subject myself to renewed imputations of assassination?"⁸⁰

Mudd had no ethical position to justify withholding physician services.⁸¹ Yet he not only considered withholding treatment but felt justified in communicating his indecision as part of a long, detailed letter clearly meant to be made public to his benefit. Somehow, he thought his indecision was justified and would be considered acceptable, perhaps even admirable.

Mudd persistently criticized other doctors at the fort by questioning the quality of their work, usually in backhanded ways, assigning them blame for deaths while embellishing his own work as successful. This practice began, as discussed previously, by his accusing Holder of mistreating patients, including, it would seem from the context, those to whom Mudd had wrongly dispensed medicine.

Smith came next. Mudd held that Smith died because he was uncooperative and late to be treated. In Mudd's words, "Dr. Smith was not under my care until a short time before his death, when, under hallucination of the disease, he persistently refused to take any medication or submit to treatment,"⁸² Actually, Smith came under Mudd's care on the first day of his illness. Mudd was blaming Smith for his own death, which, as noted above, he ignored in spinning the story that no one died on his watch. He observed, "Many of the

deaths reported have not occurred here, but on an adjacent island where we have erected a hospital; more than half sent there have died. I claim credit of having broken up this establishment, and having inaugurated an entirely different system of treatment. Smith admitted, before his death, that he had never seen a case of it before, and acknowledged his incompetency to treat the malady.”⁸³ According to Mudd, unlike himself, Smith was incompetent.

Mudd consistently and persistently undermined Whitehurst by frequently citing his age and ignoring that he, not Mudd, was the doctor-in-charge. Unlike Mudd’s resistance to serve, Whitehurst returned to the fort from Key West on the same day he was asked to take over the epidemic. Mudd continued to emphasize Whitehurst’s age as a negative: “Dr. Whitehurst from Key West is an old man, sixty odd years of age.” Mudd wrote that “The Doctor Whitehurst, who was expelled from the island the beginning of the war, on account of the sympathies of his wife, ... he is now an old man.” Another example of the Mudd treatment contained the same condescending criticism: “Dr. W., who is very old, and is a little slow in his actions and treatment ...”⁸⁴ In many of Mudd’s letters, while praising himself, he found ways to undermine the competency and reputation of the experienced Whitehurst or to ignore his engagement all together.

Whitehurst in fact was a well-respected, second-generation Florida physician and civic leader. He was not expelled from the fort at the beginning of the war but continued working there late into 1862.⁸⁵ Whitehurst was a Unionist, a white Southerner who opposed secession, and active in the

African repatriation movement. Mudd stated in his letters that Whitehurst, not he, was attending Smith and his family before their deaths. As discussed, Smith was Mudd's patient, and he died soon after Whitehurst's arrival – any disclaimer of responsibility is clearly confusation.⁸⁶ Similarly, deflecting any blame for the death of the commander's son, Mudd states that he was only called in for consultation by Whitehurst, ignoring Mudd's previous days attending to the boy's illness.⁸⁷

Mudd similarly stated that it was Whitehurst who was treating O'Loughlen when he died. In Mudd's words, "He was taken sick whilst my kind friend, Dr. D. W. Whitehurst of Key West, Florida, had charge of the Post; from him he received prompt medical attention from the beginning of his illness to his death."⁸⁸ This was not true. Mudd wrote repeatedly to others that it was he alone who was attending O'Loughlen in their shared room and criticized Whitehurst for not becoming involved.

After blaming Whitehurst for O'Loughlen's death, Mudd explained in the same letter that, "The news had spread around through the garrison of the neat and comfortable appearance of the hospital and the improved condition of the sick, which had the effect to gain for me a reputation, and the confidence of the soldiers." This was Whitehurst's hospital as "charge of the Post" and not Mudd's, who was a nursing assistant. Mudd also generalized, "When Dr. Whitehurst arrived, I yielded to his age and experience ... all those that have died in the official circle were patients of his and had all the advantages of his experience and knowledge. I feel much relieved that they did not die upon my hands."⁸⁹

He also was harsh about other caregivers – “The nurses are ignorant and careless, and I can’t act as both physician and nurse” – setting up the potential to cast any blame on improper nursing by others, never noting that in fact, he too was a nurse.⁹⁰ “I, ... have acted here entirely upon my own theory, and with unprecedented success. I can say with truth that none have died that I have seen in time and had proper attention and nursing. I am universally respected by all the soldiers, and they seem ever ready to shower complements and favors.”⁹¹ Thus, no one died under his watch with his procedures unless there was bad nursing or another extenuating factor. And as he saw it, everyone loved him.

Mudd’s writings on yellow fever as informed by the epidemic contain the consistent feature of failing to mention Whitehurst. Even Mudd’s article on health written late in life and published after his death failed to mention him.⁹² This is due to how Mudd framed his stories to elevate his role while failing to mention that he was merely an assistant, taking notes for Whitehurst on his rounds and dispensing medicine Whitehurst prescribed. Before and even after Mudd’s return home, newspaper articles praising his work while ignoring Whitehurst appeared frequently, so much so that Mudd wrote to Whitehurst disclaiming any responsibility for such egregious oversights in the writings of others. He claimed he had no part in such missives, ignoring that there could be no other source of the story.

“Let me assure you my dear friend that I have on no occasion sought distinction for the small part performed by myself during the prevalence of Fever at the post – nor have I spoken

of the subject with a view to distract from the noble & skillful services of yourself, or attaching credit to myself. ... Whatever fame has been attached to my name is entirely due to you. My duties were simply as nurse & dispenser (sic) of medicines, if as such, was worthy of mention, the greater praise is due you since I could not have occupied the position without your appointment.”⁹³ This one personal, unpublicized letter speaks much of the truth of Mudd’s work, but dozens of other letters, articles, and petitions Mudd penned or organized credit his actions alone while failing to mention his supervisor, Whitehurst.

As for Thomas, Mudd complained that he never visited Mudd in his sick room. Both he and Arnold told the story that the post doctor remained in his quarters with abundant alcohol. There is not much evidence for this behavior beyond Mudd’s accusations and there would seem little reason for the post doctor with multiple patients to visit one person, also a physician, who was weeks past the usual recuperative period and otherwise attended to. Mudd was probably not fond of the new post doctor who had dismissed his unproven protocol. There is little evidence of mutual engagement other than Mudd’s asserting that Thomas respected him. When Thomas became ill, Mudd came back into the hospital with few to treat, and pointedly was not kept on by Thomas after his return to duty.

There can be little doubt that an overriding goal in Mudd’s writing about his several medical practice engagements at the fort was lobbying for his own recognition. As early as October 1, 1867, he wrote, “I have done all that lay in [my] power and

feel encouraged by the gratitude expressed by those I have relieved. It is high time that the public be made acquainted with the fact, and those in power made to yield to proper sense of duty and regard for justice, instead of visiting upon helpless victims and unjust and tyrannical punishment.”⁹⁴

During his time at the fort, Mudd came to consider himself an expert on yellow fever. He had written his thesis on dysentery; none of what he wrote is accepted today as correct.⁹⁵ He wrote on yellow fever in an extensive letter to his wife, mentioned above, clearly intended for a wider audience and for publication in newspapers.⁹⁶ In brief, Mudd held that yellow fever was spread by “human effluvia” through soiled blankets, linens, and woolen uniforms; he also proposed a novel theory of infections that he argued proved why it was not possible to have inoculations for “typhoid fever, yellow fever, cholera, etc.”⁹⁷ Of course, each of these now have vaccines. He considered yellow fever to be a type of typhoid.

Mudd’s theory that the disease was spread by contamination from one person to the next led to his solution of avoiding sharing uncleaned cloth material. While cleanliness no doubt would control the spread of some other infections, it was not efficacious for yellow fever, which is now known to be transmitted by a vector. He presented evidence from his experience at the fort to support his view, but he interpreted it incorrectly. For example, his interpretation of one result from closure of the quarantine hospital was “... upon the breaking up of the Sand Key Hospital and the return of the nurses to the Fort, they were all speedily stricken down with the fever upon their being placed on similar duty. These nurses had

remained free from all diseases up to their return to the Fort, although the majority of the cases whom they nursed at Sand Key died of fever.”

In his view, it was exposure to dirty linens at the fort that caused their illness. He failed to note that the nurses also had been exposed to similarly dirty linens on the island and yet did not become ill. The nurses were disease free because the island was mosquito-free and they only fell sick when they returned to the fort, which was filled with contagious people and mosquitoes. Mudd’s selective use of evidence did not prove his theory. The mosquito-borne origin of the disease was not discovered until two decades after Mudd’s death, so he would not be expected to understand this, although one might expect evidence to be objectively interpreted.

Communications

Communications are key to understanding Mudd’s stay at Fort Jefferson. Mudd was his own best public relations agent.⁹⁸ A mail boat was scheduled to arrive from Key West every two weeks; he tried to make each one. He expected correspondence and chastised those who failed to write or keep him up to date on what they were doing to free him. He was repeatedly harsh on his wife, criticizing her composition and the encouraging words she offered that he felt misleading. After the escape attempt, letters in and, at times, out of the fort were subject to being read and returned by military censors, whose intrusiveness varied with the job holder and conditions at the time. Mudd urged his correspondents to be careful of what they wrote and that they might be able to write in code.



Samuel Mudd was his own best public relations agent, sending letters from the fort meant to foster action on his behalf, especially through his wife, Sarah Frances Dyer Mudd, who repeatedly pled his ever-changing arguments, including directly to President Andrew Johnson. In 1869, days before he left office, Johnson handed Mudd's pardon papers directly to Mrs. Mudd. (Courtesy National Park Service)

He wrote to his wife that his niece should "... be more prudent in her writing? The last letter that arrived was not handed to me on account of insulting language. She must have been aware that all correspondence is inspected previous to delivery to prisoners, and language prejudicial to me or herself would be observed and likely noted. Do caution her for the future, and allow nothing in your power to be said or done having a tendency to prolong my misery." And later, "I fear a copy of a former letter of Fannie's has been sent to the War Department, ... I fear imprudent talk and writing will yet dispose the mind of the president not to listen to your appeals on my behalf."⁹⁹ Mudd was very much in charge of controlling his correspondence, in and out. He did not preserve the correspondence he received. Fortunately, his wife and others preserved their side of it.

Mudd repeatedly wrote to his wife, brothers-in-law Jeremiah and Tom Dyer, his still supportive and influential lawyers, and other potential supporters. His supporters wrote to newspapers, politicians, and the president and held meetings with influential people including the president. Mostly, he wrote to encourage or instruct them to act on his behalf. As in the multiple examples above, Mudd showed himself to be a master of the spin. Correspondence was his main weapon; letters crafted to his own benefit were meant to be revealed through newspapers, magazines, and petitions to a public and political audience, and so provide consistent arguments on his behalf.

He wrote to his wife, "I have written between thirty and forty letters to various ones. I have written at least a half a dozen

to General Ewing, and Stone three or four. Jere and others as many each. I am truly anxious to know if they intend to keep me here this Administration. I want to know public opinion. ... When you write, send me newspaper extracts or clippings that may be favorable or otherwise towards us, or to me.”¹⁰⁰ An example of the focus of his correspondence is an 1865 letter to one of his brothers-in-law, in which he mentions: “I sent you what might be a copy of a letter to Secretary Stanton ... so that you and counsel can advise regarding. You may admit and supply [which means insert and delete] as you think the case may require.”¹⁰¹ He drafted his appeal letter to be sent by others.

His methods were revealed by Emily Holder, who wrote that, “He asked my husband to send a long letter, which he gave him to read, to *The New York Herald* – a very sensational and untrue report of the treatment of the prisoners. He had imagined all sorts of indignities and persecutions, when, in fact, they were treated to the same conditions as the surrounding soldiers.” There is no evidence that her husband, Holder, who characteristically and repeatedly spoke up on behalf of prisoners he felt were unjustly convicted or treated, sent it.¹⁰² But the example shows how Mudd worked.

Much of Mudd’s correspondence seems rather passive-aggressive, berating non-correspondents or criticizing correspondence not meeting his current needs while asserting that such lack of or unhelpful communication was responsible for increasing his own stress. He informed his wife, “If I don’t hear from you soon, I am afraid I will become indifferent and

careless,” and “I am very anxious to hear from you, and when a mail service arrives without bringing any intelligence, I feel more heavily in my exile.”¹⁰³

On secondhand information, he again wrote to his wife, stating, “I received yesterday a letter from Cousin Ann, apparently reflecting your opinions, protracting my stay in this hell for several months longer. ... The vagaries which you and others had so implicitly imparted, or intentionally to stimulate hope, had had the reacting influence. ... You are not alone, my darling, in contributing to these emotions; nearly every letter received the past seven or eight months has had the tendency to lead me to expect release at an early day ... You spoke of the sympathy of friends, etc. Their kind wishes can never do me any good so long as I am here caged; on the contrary. I fear you do me harm by expressions of any opinion favorable to the president and his policy.”¹⁰⁴ Of course it was Mudd who had set the plan in motion that Johnson was to be engaged in securing his release. At the end of a letter to Jeremiah Dyer that otherwise was mostly about death at the fort, Mudd informed him, “Arnold received the box sent by his friends. Why don’t you write?”¹⁰⁵

Mudd’s most successful enterprise was to convince soldiers at the fort to sign on to a letter of commendation for his services. Why would soldiers on their own single out Mudd for praise and not the other doctors who were actually in charge? Remember: He was known to use his money for bribes. Mudd repeatedly asserted that he had no knowledge of the petition being passed around praising his medical work during the epidemic.¹⁰⁶ But, in a letter to his wife at the start of

the epidemic, he inquired if such petition would help secure his release. "Let me know if a petition signed by the officers of the Post would be to any avail. I have thought over the matter, and think that under present circumstances, the public mind might justify some ameliorating action upon the part of the president."¹⁰⁷ This indicates that Mudd was planning for the petition before it began. He started with junior officers who took it down the chain of command. Once the petition was under way, he offered to send "the original or a copy [of the petition], which friends can present in person."¹⁰⁸ Mudd's disclaimer of involvement was a lie; he certainly managed the creation of a petition through a couple of junior officers who had their men make their marks and pass it up the chain. Mudd managed the petition's delivery to Washington, D.C.¹⁰⁹ It worked; Johnson, although ignoring it when presented, cited it in his pardon.

The Pardon

Mudd's temperament swung wildly through his captivity as he interpreted one event after another or one letter and then another as suggesting his early release. He took words of encouragement as fact and expressed his disappointment with correspondents when his interpretations proved untrue or untimely. His bitterness toward those he held responsible for his imprisonment deepened with time. Emily Holder found him restless and brooding.¹¹⁰ Much of his behavior during imprisonment can be explained by the description offered by his one-time mentor George Mudd, who said of his cousin that his downfall was due to, "that obstinacy of character, his prejudices, his false sense of honor, ... a want of moral courage."¹¹¹



Over the years, Samuel Mudd's descendants repeatedly lobbied for his exoneration. In 1961, Congress approved erecting a plaque at Fort Jefferson, which carefully excerpts President Andrew Johnson's pardon statement omitting lines that qualify the pardon – Mudd has never been exonerated of his crimes. (Courtesy National Park Service)

The last couple of years of Mudd's imprisonment were primarily devoted to his organizing to obtain a pardon before Johnson left office. With that deadline looming, activities intensified. Mudd's letters gave instructions and advice on how to proceed with his case. His arguments evolved over time: the unfairness of his trial and that perjury was committed (ignoring his own lies to the investigating authorities); the unjustness of the verdict to a person innocent of the conspiracy (ignoring that his conviction was not participating in the murder conspiracy but for aiding in Booth's escape);

his changing excuses for lying to investigators; the illegality of the trial; the vileness of the punishment and his personal mistreatment; and the merit accrued by his taking medical charge at the fort and saving soldiers from yellow fever.

Over the years, prominent people intervened directly with the president on Mudd's behalf, including his well-respected lawyers; Ford Theater owner John T. Ford, who also was attempting to free Spangler; Jeremiah Dyer, who had influence in Baltimore; and Tom Dyer, who had influence in New Orleans where Fort Jefferson's command was located. Mrs. Mudd's engagement was crucial to the effort and she visited the president herself, receiving encouraging responses.¹¹²

Johnson repeatedly was reported to have professed his intention to free Mudd when politics permitted. It was Johnson's many thousand pardons of Confederates and their sympathizers that was one of the underlying grievances leading to his impeachment for removing from office the leader of a strong federal approach to Reconstruction, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, without congressional approval. Political impediments dwindled as Johnson's term came towards an end.

With Mudd's orchestration, his supporters lined up to plead his cause. The Hartford County Medical Society, Maryland's congressional delegation, and thirty-nine members of Congress sent petitions.¹¹³ The governor of Maryland, several state justices, and congressmen met with the president on Mudd's behalf. A bill was introduced

into Congress to compensate Mudd for his services in the epidemic, compensation that would have been six times what Whitehurst was paid for being the post doctor actually in charge of the health crisis. Mudd's lawyers wrote and submitted detailed briefs outlining the arguments for release. They also unsuccessfully filed for a writ of habeas corpus in Key West.

Johnson waited until a few weeks before the end of his term, but on February 8, 1869, he signed Mudd's pardon.¹¹⁴ The document suggests that Mudd's professional responsibility to treat Booth left uncertainty as to his motive. It cites Mudd's work during the yellow fever epidemic but that Johnson was satisfied with the finding of his guilt in harboring and concealing the fugitives. The president stated that he believed Mudd had no complicity in the conspiracy to kill Lincoln. The same day, Johnson called in Mudd's wife and handed her the papers. She passed on her husband's pardon to her brother, Tom Dyer, who engaged a courier in New Orleans to present the document at the fort. Mudd was to be free.

On March 2, 1869, on the last day of his term, Johnson pardoned the two other living conspirators, Spangler and Arnold. For all Mudd's work on behalf of himself alone, the other conspirators were also freed. Mudd left Fort Jefferson for Key West on March 11, 1869, a month and half shy of four years on the Dry Tortugas. He was only thirty-five years old. In Key West he caught a well-appointed steamer traveling from Havana to Baltimore. He arrived in Baltimore, went to

the home of his brother-in-law, Jeremiah Dyer, was attended by his supporters, and returned to his farm on March 20. Mudd's time at Fort Jefferson was over.

Mudd's rehabilitation in the public mind was well under way by the time he returned owing to the massive publicity leading up to his pardon. After being disappointed at his inability to control an interview soon after his release, he went silent on his experiences at the fort, other than within his writings on yellow fever. His wife gave only one more interview, late in life, and declared it her last. George Mudd was asked in an interview why his cousin did not leave his own record. He replied, "The reason Sam Mudd never spoke on that question was that he had prevaricated to his own neighbors, friends, and kin to such an extent that he was ashamed of himself. ... When he came back to this vicinity he saw that his best policy was silence, he hardly ever talked on the question at all."¹¹⁵ Apparently, Mudd did not want to try to keep up the framework of lies created at Fort Jefferson; they had done their job, he had his pardon, and he was back home.

Mudd's cause was taken up by his descendants, especially Dr. Richard Mudd, who was seeking a full exoneration.¹¹⁶ At his descendants' urging, Congress was prevailed upon, with considerable resistance, to authorize a plaque to be installed in Fort Jefferson honoring Mudd. Richard Mudd claimed it an exoneration. Placed there in 1961 near one of the cells, it is now a historic artifact on its own right.¹¹⁷ It reads:

"... upon occasion of the prevalence of the yellow fever ... Samuel A. Mudd devoted himself to the care and cure of

the sick, and interposed his courage and skill to protect the garrison ... from peril and alarm and thus ... saved many valuable lives and earned the admiration and gratitude of all who observed or experienced his generous and faithful service to humanity.”¹¹⁸

Its text is excerpted from Johnson’s pardon with ellipses eliminating historically problematic elements.

The first ellipsis omits the president’s statement “I am satisfied that the guilt found by the said judgement against Samuel A. Mudd was of receiving, entertaining, harboring and concealing John Wilkes Booth and David E. Herold with the intent to aid, abet and assist them in escaping from justice.”¹¹⁹ This ellipsis omits the president’s finding of Mudd’s guilt as an accomplice to the murder after the fact.

The second ellipsis omits the president’s statement “and the death by that pestilence of the medical officer of the post.”¹²⁰ This ellipsis avoids mentioning the erroneous basis underlying much of Mudd’s claim that he was responsible for treating the yellow fever epidemic after the post doctor died.

The third ellipsis omits “and thus as the officers and men unite in testifying,” omitting Johnson’s reference to the Mudd-concocted petition, which the president’s next paragraph of the pardon cites in detail.¹²¹

And finally, the plaque omits Johnson’s “grant to the said Dr. Samuel A. Mudd a full and unconditional pardon,” omitting that he provided a pardon, not an exoneration.¹²² Richard

Mudd had petitioned for a full exoneration, but that potential language was stricken from the draft bill in Congress because of opposition from multiple civic and historic groups. Mudd has never been exonerated.

The plaque's text is restricted to recognition of Mudd during the epidemic. There is no equivalent plaque for the other doctors serving at the fort who prevented yellow fever from arriving or who were in charge during the epidemic – Holder, Bell, Whitehurst, and Thomas – all of whom have faded from public consciousness. On the parade ground of the fort is an impressive monument to Smith, whose failure to maintain Holder's quarantine procedures allowed yellow fever to gain its foothold in the fort.

Mudd, above all, was a master of his public relations. Of the convicted conspirators, only Booth remains more famous. Mudd's home in Maryland is kept by the family as a fascinating museum. Booth's trail to Mudd's house is followed by those consumed with the Lincoln assassination.¹²³ At Fort Jefferson in Dry Tortugas National Park, thousands annually visit Mudd's cells and his commemorative plaque affixed deep within the fort's arched interior. Mudd resided in the fort for less than four of its more than 175-year history. Yet Fort Jefferson now as much as ever remains linked to the memory and legacy of one Southern Maryland country doctor, Samuel A. Mudd.

Endnotes

1. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln is likely the most studied and written-about episode in American history. A 36-foot tower of fewer than half of the 15,000 books published on Lincoln decorates the staircase of the Ford's Theatre Center for Education and Leadership in Washington, D.C. The story of those charged as conspirators has its own literature, starting as early as the year of the trial (B. P. Poore, *The Conspiracy Trial for the Murder of the President and the Attempt to Overthrow the Government by the Assassination of its Principal Officer*. (Boston: J. E. Tilton, 1865); and Anon., *Trial of the Assassins and Conspirators for the Murder of Abraham Lincoln, and the Attempted Assassination of Vice-President Johnson and the Whole Cabinet*. (Philadelphia: Barclay & Company, 1865), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov//service/lawlib/law0001/2009/200900209112991/200900209112991.pdf>). Also published in 1865 was Army reporter Benjamin Pitman's official report (B. Pittman, *The Assassination of President Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators David E. Herold, Mary E. Surratt, Lewis Payne, George A. Atzerodt, Edward Spangler, Samuel A. Mudd, Samuel Arnold, Michael O'Loughlen*. (Cincinnati and New York: Moore, Wiltstach & Boldwin, 1865) (<https://archive.org/details/assassinationprooherogoog>).

The Mudd family contributed greatly to the historic record: daughter Nettie Mudd, only five years old when her father died, told his story from family recollections and letters from him, securing them for posterity; grandson Richard D. Mudd traced the family's history; great-grandson Robert K. Summers provided an essential compendium of his life, which also allows access to primary sources. These

contributions include N. Mudd, *The Life of Dr. Samuel A. Mudd, containing his letters from Fort Jefferson, Dry Tortugas Island, where he Was Imprisoned Four Years for Alleged Complicity in the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*. (New York and Washington: The Neale Publishing Company, 1906); R. D. Mudd, *The Mudd Family of the United States*. (By the author, 1951); R. K. Summers, *The Assassin's Doctor, The Life and Letters of Samuel A. Mudd*. (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014); R. K. Summers, *The Doctor's Slaves, Samuel Mudd, Slavery, and the Lincoln Assassination*. (By the author, 2015). Other surviving conspirators also contributed. Spangler provided his story to a newspaper; Arnold wrote a memoir, as did unindicted conspirator Thomas Jones (E. Spangler, *New York World*, June 24, 1869, in Summers, *Assassins*, 559-567; S. B. Arnold, *Defense and Prison Experiences of a Lincoln Conspirator* (Hattiesburg MS: Book Farm, 1943); T. A. Jones, *J. Wilkes Booth: An Account of his Sojourn in Southern Maryland after the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, his Passage across the Potomac, and his Death in Virginia*. (Chicago: Laird & Lee, 1893) (<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433043100175&view=1up&seq=7>).

More recent works include contributions of Edward J. Steers and Michael Kauffman. E. J. Steers, *His Name is Still Mudd: The Case Against Doctor Samuel Alexander Mudd*. (New York: Thomas Publications, 1997); M. W. Kauffman, *American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies* (New York: Random House, 2005); *Samuel Bland Arnold: Memoires of a Lincoln Conspirator*. (Bowie MD: Heritage Books, 1995), *In the Footsteps of an Assassin*. (Bedford NH:

TravelBrains, 2012), *Looking Through Booth's Eyes*, 2012, www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/books/kauffman.htm, *Walking in Booth's Shoes*, www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/books/kauffman2.htm). Exaggeration of the conditions the conspirators endured has been fodder for popular lore, including books and movies such as P. B. Mueller, *A Shadow of Hope: Dr. Samuel Mudd 1864-1871*. (Jekyll Island GA: Pinata Publishing, 2018); *The Prisoner of Shark Island*, (www.imdb.com/title/tt0028141/, 1936); *The Ordeal of Dr. Mudd*, (www.imdb.com/title/tt0081281/, 1980). Websites with information include: www.drsmudd.org; www.muddresearch.com; www.LincolnConspirators.com; www.surrattmuseum.org/; www.fords.org; www.nps.gov/foth; www.nps.gov/drto; www.drytortugas.com.

2. Executive Mansion, July 5, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 90.

3. Summers, *Assassins*, 90-91.

4. Steers, *His Name*; Kauffman, *American*; Summers, *Assassins*, 1-2.

5. Orville Hickman Browning to Thomas Ewing, July 29, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 95-96.

6. The prisoners are usually called the “conspirators,” although that label is not totally appropriate, as not all were convicted of conspiring. They also were called “state prisoners” to distinguish them from military prisoners. The terms mostly are used interchangeably.

7. Summers, *Assassins*, 67-74.

8. Major General August V. Kautz, one of the military commission, confirms this view of Spangler in his memoir, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* in Summers, *Assassins*, 691-696.

9. M. K. Kauffman. *Looking Through Booth's Eyes*.

10. Summers, *Assassins*, 11-12, 18, 24-2; Summers, *Doctor's Slaves*, 3, 13-15, 30-38, 66-73.

11. Summers, *Assassins*, 37.

12. J. S. Callaghan to Father George, October 17, 1852, in Summers, *Assassins*, 161-163.

13. Usually referred to as a cousin, George Mudd was a second cousin to Samuel Mudd, and a first cousin to both Mudd's father and mother (G. A. Townsend, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 16, 1883, in Summers, *Assassins*, 590-603).

14. Before changing his story, Mudd admitted several times that he had recognized Booth when he came to his house for treatment and revealed that he knew Booth was the assassin to two people before it was publicly announced. It was Booth's boot found at Mudd's house that convinced the authorities of the assassin's identity. The most compelling testimony for Mudd's knowing Booth, Mudd's involvement in the kidnapping plot, and his role in planning Booth's escape route was provided by his medical mentor and relative, Dr.

George D. Mudd, in 1881 (Townsend in Summers, *Assassins*, 590-603). Mudd's knowing that he was harboring a fugitive, giving him a place to hide, his delay in passing information on to authorities, and his lying to them was without doubt criminal. President Andrew Johnson in his eventual pardon of Mudd confirms the commission's verdict that Mudd was guilty of entertaining, harboring, and concealing Booth and David E. Herold with the intent to aid, abet, and assist them in escaping after the assassination. Despite over a century of pleadings by the family and others, the verdict against Mudd has never been overturned; he has never been exonerated (M. S. Lederman, "The Law of the Lincoln Assassination," *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 118, No. 2, March 26, 2018, columbialawreview.org/content/the-law-of-the-lincoln-assassination/).

15. Townsend, in Summers, *Assassins*, 590-603.

16. This was the first of Mudd's many attempts to recast history to deflect blame, accuse others, and imagine scenarios to try to exonerate himself, as discussed beyond. The pattern of lying and creating alternative realities for public consumption would characterize Mudd's actions during his stay at Fort Jefferson. It was the first web of lies immediately after the assassination that turned him from a witness to a defendant, and eventually a prisoner. Beyond the scope of this paper is how a person's years of fabricating repeated and even conflicting lies in public in the face of widely proven facts can become so accepted to the public.

17. J. A. Kushlan and K. Hines, *Dry Tortugas National Park*. (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2019). T. Reid, *America's Fortress: A History of Fort Jefferson, Dry Tortugas, Florida*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

18. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 47-68.

19. *Ibid*, 31.

20. Reid, *America's Fortress*, 83-87.

21. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 54. J. A. Kushlan, *Seeking the American Tropics: South Florida's Early Naturalists*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020). J. A. Kushlan, "The Holders of the Dry Tortugas," *Tequesta*, No. 80 (2020), 164-200. Dr. Holder's wife, Emily, provided the most compelling view of the fort as a community (E. Holder, "At the Dry Tortugas During the War," *Californian Illustrated Magazine* (1892) 1, No. 2, 87-93; 1 No. 3, 179-189; 1 No. 4, 274-282; 1 No. 5, 397-403; 1 No. 6, 585-589; 2 No. 7, 102-109; 2 No. 2, 206-10; 2 No. 8, 388-95; 2 No. 8, 557-60. Also available as *At the Dry Tortugas During the War: A Lady's Journal* (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, WPA Federal Writers Project Collection) and available online or printed from a number of sources (e.g., fcit.usf.edu/florida/docs/t/tortugas.htm) as *Emily Holder At the Dry Tortugas During the War*. Dr. Holder's writing fills in other details. He held a dual appointment as a doctor to the Army Engineers and as a naturalist for the Smithsonian Institution (J. A. Kushlan, "The Holders," 164-200; J. B. Holder, "The Dry Tortugas," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 37 (1868),

No. 218, 260-267; "Along the Florida Reef," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1871) 42 No. 249, 355-363; 42 No. 250, 515-526; 42 No. 251, 706-718; 42 No. 252, 820-830; 43 No. 253, 26-36; 43 No. 254, 187-195, 1868-1871). The most enchanting account of this period of the fort's civilian history is the semi-fictional book by the Holders' son Charles, who essentially grew up at the fort during the Civil War (C. F. Holder, *Along the Florida Reef*. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1892). These accounts could not be more different from the stories emanating from Mudd.

22. Reid, *America's Fortress*, 78-79.

23. Summers, *Assassins*, 279-285.

24. Kushlan, "The Holders," 154-200.

25. Summers, *Assassins*, 308.

26. Summers, *Assassins*, 2014, 107-108.

27. *Harper's Weekly*, 9 October 21, 1865, 460; Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 62.

28. Summers, *Assassins*, 108-109.

29 Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer, in Summers, *Assassins*, 310.

30. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, October 18, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 317.

31. Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer, in Summers, *Assassins*, 310.

32. Reid, *America's Fortress*, 94; S. Z. Starr, *Colonel Grenfell's Wars: The Life of a Soldier of Fortune*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971).

33. Reid, *America's Fortress*, 95.

34. Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer, November 11, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 324-325.

35. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 63.

36. *Ibid*, 120.

37. *Ibid*, 69-86.

38. *Ibid*, 63.

39. Reid, *America's Fortress*, 99; Mrs. Mudd to President Andrew Johnson, December 22, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 335-337.

40. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, August 24, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 103-104.

41. Arnold, *Memoirs*.

42. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 55. Examples of soldier's writing include: A. O'D, "Thirty Months at the Dry

Tortugas,” *The Galaxy Miscellany* (1869), 282-288; C. Shedd, “The Calvin Shedd Papers, The Civil War in Florida: Letters of a New Hampshire Soldier,” <http://scholar.library.miami.edu/shedd/index.html>); G. W. Albert in Reid, *America’s Fortress*, 69, 72. E. Holder (1892) wrote entertainingly about the situation.

43. E. Holder, *Dry Tortugas*.

44. Kushlan, “The Holders,” 164-200.

45. Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer, December 9, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 327.

46. Thomas Dyer to Samuel Mudd, May 11, 1866; Summers, *Assassins*, 370. Thirty dollars in 1866 would be equivalent to nearly \$500 today. Money was not much of an issue for Mudd while in prison; his family sent it as needed. His willingness to use his family money for bribes and to curry favors no doubt led the commander to withhold all but \$3 at a time after his escape attempt.

47. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, October 8, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 458.

48. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, October 14, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 493.

49. Mrs. Mudd to President Johnson, October 12, 1865 in Summers, *Assassins*, 2014, 335.

Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, December 23, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 338.

50. Summers, *Assassins*, 119.

51. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 58-59.

52. Reid, *America's Fortress*, 106-107.

53. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 59.

54. Reid, *America's Fortress*, 94-95.

55. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 58. Kushlan, "The Holders," 171-2.

56. Summers, *Doctor's Slaves*, 125.

57. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, October 18, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 496.

58. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, August 24, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 103-104.

59. Summers, *Doctor's Slaves*, 111.

60. Summers, *Doctor's Slaves*, 112.

61. Dr. Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer, September 30, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 310.

62. Summers, *Assassins*, 111.

63. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 64.

64. Ibid.

65. Kushlan, "The Holders."

66. Samuel A. Mudd Pardon, U.S. National Archives, B-596, RG 204, August 2, 1869, in Summers, *Assassins*, 552-554.

67. Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer, September 8, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 471.

68. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, October 29, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 130.

69. Summers, *Assassins*, 136.

70. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 19, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 478.

71. Summers, *Assassins*, 503.

72. Most patients who contract yellow fever are asymptomatic; of those who exhibit symptoms, about 86% are mild cases whereas about 14% become seriously ill; of serious cases 20%-50% die within two weeks; recovery from mild symptoms usually is 3-4 days and from cases that entered the toxic phase up to a few weeks (www.cdc.gov/yellowfever/symptoms/index.html; www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/yellow-

fever; https://www.medicinenet.com/yellow_fever/article.htm#yellow_fever_facts). That recovery even from the most severe cases takes only a few weeks, which places Mudd's taking six weeks away from his assignment in perspective. The official toll of the yellow fever epidemic at Fort Jefferson is that 38 of 270 who caught the disease died. We now know from modern medicine that there would have been more cases than those that required medical care. The total fort population was 387, but many of the active duty soldiers were in isolation away from the fort and so not exposed. So it is not possible to calculate epidemic statistics based on present practice. But the official 14% mortality rate was low; mortality rates of those declared ill often reached 30% or 40%. Active duty soldiers suffered the heaviest mortality. Only two prisoners died, one under Mudd's care. The epidemic at Fort Jefferson in reality was relatively mild.

73. Summers, *Assassins*, 310-311. Only Mudd referred to himself as the "chief" of dispensary; otherwise, he was referred to in this period as a nurse or assistant.

74. Kushlan, "The Holders."

75. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 59.

76. Samuel Mudd to G. B. Andrews, December 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 519.

77. D. W. Whitehurst to C. H. Crane, October 31, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 525-526.

78. E. Thomas, "Special report on yellow fever at Fort Jefferson," October 31, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 503.

79. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, October 28, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 128-129.

80. The first sentence of the first article of the American Medical Association's ethics statement at the time stated that a physician should not only be ever ready to obey the calls of the sick, but his mind ought also to be imbued with the greatness of his mission, and the responsibility he habitually incurs in its discharge (www.ama-assn.org/sites/ama-assn.org/files/corp/media-browser/public/ethics/1847code_o.pdf). To refuse service was unethical, and personal pique would seem not to characterize a mind imbued with the greatness of the medical mission.

81. "Dr. Samuel Mudd's Guide to Health," *Baltimore Sun*, March 10, 1883, in Summers, *Assassins*, 575-589.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 13, 1867 in Summers, *Assassins*, 472. Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer, October 1, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 491.

84. Reid, *America's Fortress*, 67.

85. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 13, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 473, September 17, 1867, 475.

86. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 17, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 475.

87. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 17, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 475. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 19, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 478. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 23, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 483.

88. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 25, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 485.

89. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 30, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 490.

90. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 30, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 479.

91. "Dr. Samuel Mudd's Guide to Health," in Summers, *Assassins*, 575-589

92. Samuel Mudd to Dr. Whitehurst, April 19, 1898, in Summers, *Assassins*, 557.

93. Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer Oct 1, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 49-492.

94. S. M. Mudd, *An Inaugural Dissertation on Dysentery Submitted for Examination of the Provost, Regents and*

Faculty of Physic of the University of Maryland for the Degree of Doctor of Medicine, 1856, in Summers, *Assassins*, 164-177.

95. Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer September 8, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 471. “Dr. Samuel Mudd’s Guide to Health,” in Summers, *Assassins*, 575- 589. S. A. Mudd, “Epidemics and Infection,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 25, 1873, in Summer, *Assassins*, 568-572.

96. Many of Mudd’s outgoing letters were preserved by the family and have been made available, which allowed me to consult the original material for this paper (N. Mudd, “The Life”; Summers, *Assassins*). These are exceptional and generous contributions to the historic record. Few inbound letters to him are preserved. He writes that he organized his correspondence while in prison, but these letters were not saved or were destroyed. Fortunately, Sarah Mudd saved hers.

97. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, December 14, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 331. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, December 25, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 343.

98. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 5, 1865, Summers, *Assassins*, 132, 301. General Thomas Ewing and Representative Frederick Stone were his lawyers. “Tom” referenced Tom Dyer, Mudd’s brother-in-law living in New Orleans where the command managing Fort Jefferson was located. Tom sent Mudd money and helped pay for his lawyers. Jere was Jeremiah Dyer, also Mudd’s wife’s brother and neighbor, Baltimore businessman, fellow Confederate

sympathizer and a person with a wide range of powerful contacts he used on Mudd's behalf. He was Mrs. Mudd's primary source of support while Mudd was in prison, and the first person Mudd visited when released.

99. Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer, October 11, 1865, in Summers, *Assassins*, 324-325.

100. E. Holder, "Dry Tortugas." Reid, *America's Fortress*, 89.

101. Summers, *Assassins*, 104; Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd March 22, 1866, in Summers, *Assassins*, 360.

102. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, October 6, 1866, in Summers, *Assassins*, 373-374.

103. Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer, September 21, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 481-482.

104. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, October 18, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 495. Summers, *Assassins*, 590-603.

105. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 3, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 467.

106. Samuel Mudd to Jeremiah Dyer, October 18, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 497.

107. Samuel Mudd to Mrs. Mudd, September 3, 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 467. Samuel Mudd to Major Andrews, December 1867, in Summers, *Assassins*, 519.

108. E. Holder, "Dry Tortugas."
109. Townsend, in Summers, *Assassins*, 597, 599.
110. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 68.
111. Mrs. Mudd to Samuel Mudd, January 39, 1869, in Summers, *Assassins*, 551.
112. Samuel A. Mudd Pardon, in Summers, *Assassins*.
113. Townsend 1883, in Summers, *Assassins*, 601.
114. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 68.
115. Ibid, 67-68.
116. Ibid.
117. Kushlan and Hines, *Dry Tortugas*, 67. Lincolnconspirators.com/2012/10/07/a-plaque-for-dr-mudd/. Dr. Samuel A. Mudd's Pardon, in Summers, *Assassins*, 552-554.
118. Lincolnconspirators.com
119. Ibid.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid.

122. Ibid.

123. Kauffman, "Walking In Booth's Shoes."