

# OUR CAMP JOURNAL



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"We are but few in number but formidable." -Pvt. James Shelton, 7th Md. Co. B

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## Civil War Unknowns



By Jeff Joyce

Estimates vary on the number of soldiers killed, wounded and captured or missing (Federal and Confederate) during the Civil War. One estimate of total casualties is 1.5 million, which breaks down to 620,000 killed, 476,000 wounded and 400,000 captured or missing. Some estimates of Civil War dead are as high as 850,000.

During the Civil War most dead were buried where they fell or in temporary cemeteries near field hospitals and camps. Soldiers wore no formal identification, such as the "dog tags" issued by the Army starting in World War I. Some soldiers purchased engraved identity disks while others pinned a piece of paper to their uniform with their name before going into battle. Letters and photographs carried by a soldier could also help identify him.



Temporary markers would often be placed on a grave, using pieces of supply boxes or assorted scraps of wood. Unfortunately, the elements and passage of armies often obliterated these markers.

Clara Barton, the "Angel of the Battlefield", attended wounded soldiers during the war and in 1865 established the Missing Soldiers Office in Washington. Receiving thousands of letters from families desperate for information on their missing loved ones Clara and her assistants worked to bring closure to as many grieving families as possible. Starting first at the Andersonville prisoner of war camp in Georgia and then elsewhere, Clara's team helped identify over 20,000 dead during the next two years. Unfortunately, it's estimated that at least half of Civil War dead remain unidentified. With the end of the war the Army

made a concerted effort to find and move Federal dead to the newly created national cemeteries. In September 1866 the remains of 2,111 unknowns gathered from the battlefields of Virginia were placed in a monument adjacent to Arlington House at Arlington National Cemetery. When Culpeper National Cemetery was established in 1867 the remains of 1,355 dead were moved there, including 912 unknowns.

Between 1862 and 1865 the 7th Maryland lost 1 officer and 78 enlisted men killed or mortally wounded and 1 officer and 109 enlisted men to disease, a total of 189 deaths. It's likely at least some of the 7<sup>th</sup> Maryland dead remain unidentified, buried in an unmarked grave or underneath an "Unknown" marker, their names known but to God.

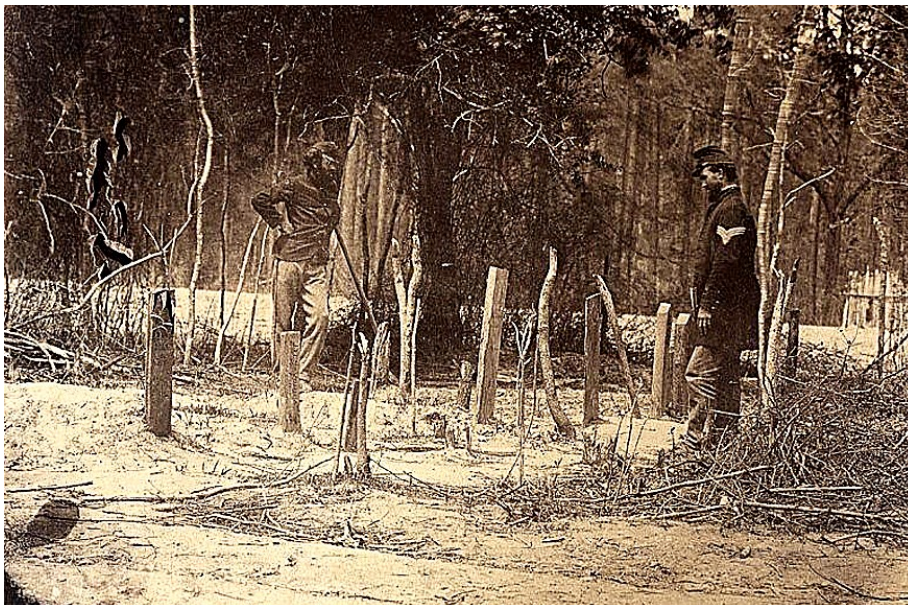
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Above, Clara Barton, the "Angel of the Battlefield" attended wounded soldiers during the war.

Left, the crudely marked graves of wounded US soldiers.

Below, an engraved identity disk.



# Upcoming Campaigns

## JULY

**July 3-5: 163rd Gettysburg, Daniel Lady farm, Gettysburg, PA** Visit: [www.GBPA.org](http://www.GBPA.org) to register online.  
**FVB Commanded Event (Individual Event)**

**July 17-19: Funkstown, MD**  
<http://www.funkstown.com/special-events/day-in-the-park/>

**\*(FVB Event) (7<sup>th</sup> MD COMPANY Event)**

## AUGUST

**August 29-30: Carroll County Farm Museum- Col. Monzi; Commanding (Individual Event)**

## SEPTEMBER

**September 12-13: Frederick County Parks & Recreation Civil War Days -Crampton's Gap (7<sup>th</sup> MD COMPANY Event)**

**September 26-27: Soldering**

**Through the Ages – at [Maryland Veterans Museum](#)**

11000 Crain Highway, Newburg, MD 20664 **(Individual Event)**

## OCTOBER

**October 3: Fort Ward Civil War Camp Day, October 16-18: 161st Battle of Cedar Creek, Middletown, VA - Register [www.ccbf.us](http://www.ccbf.us) \*(FVB Event) (7<sup>th</sup> MD COMPANY Event)**

## A U.S. Civil War Spy in Europe: Henry Shelton Sanford

*Who does not enjoy a good spy story? The Civil War, though fought on American soil, was also waged in drawing rooms, chancelleries, and counting houses across Europe. In that shadow war, few figures were more important—or more obscure—than Henry Shelton Sanford.*

*Lloyd W Klein explains.*

Sanford was not the kind of man one would cast as a master spy. He did not resemble the polished, worldly intelligence officer of fiction. That was precisely why he was effective. Born in Connecticut to a prosperous family whose wealth came from manufacturing brass tacks, Sanford grew up comfortably connected. One of his ancestors had served as governor of the state. He attended Trinity College and studied in Germany, though he never graduated from either. What he lacked in formal credentials he made up for in money, mobility, and social access.

At just twenty-four, Sanford entered diplomacy, appointed secretary to the American legation in St. Petersburg in 1847. A year later he moved to

Frankfurt, and in 1849 to Paris, where he remained for five years, eventually rising to chargé d'affaires. In 1861 Abraham Lincoln named him minister to Belgium. His official portfolio included trade agreements, naturalization treaties, and consular arrangements such as the Scheldt Treaties of 1863, which governed customs duties and navigation rights on one of Europe's most important commercial waterways. But Sanford's formal responsibilities were the least important part of his job. His real assignment was counterespionage.

What made Sanford valuable was not diplomacy but deniability. He was

wealthy enough not to require a salary, socially connected enough to travel freely without raising suspicion, and unburdened by the technical minutiae that tied other diplomats to their desks. Like many ministers of the era, he was assumed to be a gentleman abroad—sightseeing, attending receptions, and occasionally reporting home. That assumption was his camouflage

In reality, Sanford was one of



**Henry Shelton Sanford**

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## Henry Sanford

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the principal architects of the Union's covert war in Europe. Secretary of State William H. Seward entrusted him with authority far exceeding his nominal rank. Sanford was permitted to travel freely across the Continent and into Britain. He was given access to a secret fund of roughly one million dollars—a staggering sum at the time—to finance intelligence gathering, influence, and interference. His mission was straightforward to describe and extraordinarily difficult to execute: prevent the Confederacy from acquiring ships, weapons, credit, and diplomatic recognition.

Jefferson Davis and his government understood that they could not prevail in a prolonged war without foreign assistance. The American Revolution provided the model: French intervention had transformed rebellion into victory. Confederate leaders hoped Britain or France might play a similar role in 1862. Short of recognition, they needed rifles, cannon, powder, ships, and financing—resources Europe could supply in abundance if the Union blockade could be breached.

Seward and Charles Francis Adams, the American minister in London, formed the official diplomatic front. Sanford was tasked with the unacknowledged work behind it. From Brussels, Paris, and London, he assembled a private intelligence service. In Britain, he employed a police detective who ran operatives in major ports and industrial centers. Shipyards, foundries, arms manufacturers, insurers, and brokers were watched closely for signs of Confederate activity.

Identifying Confederate agents was rarely difficult. They were Americans from the seceded states, often with unmistakable accents and known loyalties. Some were serving Confederate officers; others were businessmen acting as intermediaries. The challenge was not knowing

who they were, but discovering what they were doing.

In a world without telephones or secure communications, conspiracies traveled on paper and wire. Letters moved through the post. Contracts were telegraphed. Shipping instructions passed between offices and ports. Sanford targeted all of it.

### How Sanford Operated

Sanford's agents bribed postal workers to copy or intercept Confederate correspondence. Telegraph clerks were paid to divert or decode messages. Clerks inside factories and shipyards were induced to hand over specifications, contracts, and delivery schedules. Couriers carried intelligence between Belgium, France, and Britain. At times, Sanford simply "borrowed" Confederate letters long enough to read them before returning them to circulation.

Through business contacts, he tracked cotton shipments, arms purchases, and financial transactions. When necessary, he quietly pressured European firms not to deal with the South. The aim was not dramatic disruption but steady suffocation.

Two Confederate operatives were of particular importance: Caleb Huse and James D. Bulloch. Huse, a West Point-trained officer and former chemistry instructor, served as the Confed-

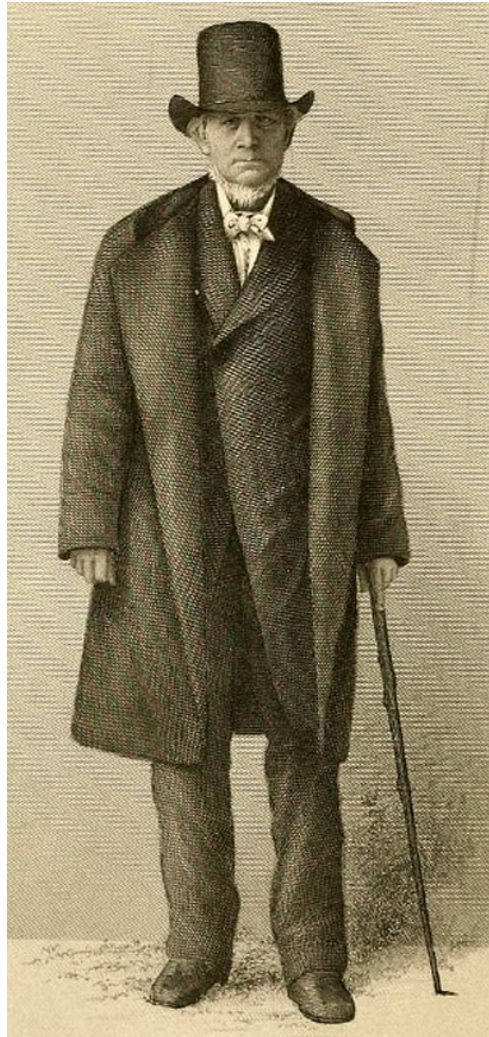
eracy's principal arms buyer. Operating across Britain, Austria, Prussia, and beyond, he negotiated most of the weapons contracts that eventually supplied Southern armies. Bulloch oversaw naval procurement, including the construction of commerce raiders in British shipyards. One of them—the *Alabama*—would devastate U.S. merchant shipping before being sunk off Cherbourg.

Sanford tracked both men closely. He fed intelligence to Adams in London, worked to delay or derail their transactions, and ensured that Washington knew when ships were likely to sail. When formal channels failed, less formal methods were sometimes employed. As Sanford joked to Seward in one letter, "accidents are numerous in the [English] Channel, you know."

### Influence and the Press

Recognition of the Confederate government before 1863 was a central Southern objective. Envoys James Mason and John Slidell were dispatched to Britain and France, though their capture during the Trent Affair nearly triggered war. While Queen Victoria was personally hostile to a slaveholding republic, British politics were complicated. Liverpool merchants depended on Southern cotton. William Gladstone spoke sympathetically of Southern independence. French policy remained opportunistic.

Seward responded with another weapon: influence. His instrument was



Thurlow Weed

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## Henry Sandford

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Thurlow Weed, a veteran political operative, newspaper man, and long-time ally. Weed held no diplomatic title—by design. He could move through London and Paris as a private citizen, cultivating editors, financiers, and politicians while quietly countering Confederate propaganda.

Weed arrived in Europe in late 1861. He subsidized friendly journalists, planted pro-Union stories, hosted salons and dinners, and gathered intelligence—especially regarding Confederate shipbuilding. Like Sanford, he carried funds and used them where persuasion alone was insufficient. If questioned, Seward could plausibly deny everything. Weed was merely a tourist. Sanford was merely a minister in Brussels. Adams remained the sole visible face of American diplomacy.

Sanford's influence operations extended far beyond Britain. By 1862 his network reached Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, and the German states. Journalists and editors were quietly supported to produce Union-friendly coverage. Articles prepared in Washington circulated abroad as "news." When Confederate agents planted stories of their own, Sanford's operatives countered them with rebuttals, leaks, or alternative narratives.

Clergy were targeted as well. American ministers appealed to European priests and pastors, urging them not to grant moral legitimacy to a slaveholding republic. In Britain, Sanford's agents worked through labor organizations, emphasizing free labor and the degradation of chattel slavery. Antislavery demonstrations were sometimes organized to appear spontaneous. On this terrain, the Confederacy was especially vulnerable.

None of this resembled conventional diplomacy. By any reasonable standard, Sanford violated the norms of neutrality. Had Belgium chosen to protest, it would have been within its

rights to demand his recall.

### How Secret Was It?

Weed's presence in Europe was unofficial; he did not hold a diplomatic title. If questioned, Seward could assert that Weed was merely a private citizen traveling abroad. However, in truth, Weed operated with the backing of the State Department, private funds, and political directives, rendering him a covert envoy in all but name. His role was designed to be deniable, which was the intention: Adams could maintain a legitimate front as the 'official' representative of U.S. diplomacy, while Weed undertook the clandestine tasks of influence and propaganda.

### Other Covert Operations

Sanford's network extended far beyond Britain. By 1862 it reached into Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, and the German states. Intelligence gathering was only one part of the enterprise. The more ambitious—and more dangerous—arm of his campaign was an organized effort to shape European public opinion.

Sanford poured money into the press. Journalists and editors were quietly subsidized to produce stories favorable to the Union. At one point he even attempted to purchase a Belgian newspaper outright. Articles prepared in Washington were circulated abroad as "news." When Confederate agents planted stories of their own, Sanford's people countered them with rebuttals, leaks, or alternative narratives.

Clergy were targeted as well. American ministers were sent to Europe to appeal to priests and pastors, urging them not to lend moral legitimacy to a slaveholding republic. In Britain, Sanford's agents worked through labor organizations, emphasizing the dignity of free labor and the degradation of chattel slavery. Antislavery demonstrations were sometimes organized to appear spontaneous. On this ground the Confederacy was especially vulnerable: however much cotton mattered, slavery repelled too many Europeans for Southern diplomacy to

overcome.

None of this resembled conventional diplomacy. When France had attempted similar manipulation of American politics during the 1790s, it had triggered the Genet Affair and nearly wrecked relations between Paris and Washington. By any reasonable standard, Sanford was violating the norms of neutrality and the limits placed on foreign ministers. Had Belgium chosen to protest, it would have been within its rights to demand his recall.

As the Union's military position deteriorated after the failed Peninsula Campaign, Seward feared that Britain and France might push for mediation—an outcome that would have legitimized Confederate independence. Thurlow Weed was therefore sent back across the Atlantic. His mission was to stiffen Adams's hand by quietly lobbying elites, feeding sympathetic journalists, and using money and charm to blunt Southern influence. Weed reported that European opinion was deeply divided, and that Confederate agents were tireless in their efforts. That only confirmed the necessity of the counteroffensive Sanford was running.

### What did President Lincoln Know About All of This?

Sanford was not a rogue operator. He worked with the knowledge of Adams and under the direction of Seward. The remaining question is how far that knowledge extended.

A letter from Sanford to Seward, dated July 4, 1861, provides an unambiguous answer. It survives in the Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress.

*From Henry S. Sanford to William H. Seward, July 4, 1861, Abraham Lincoln papers, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/resource/mal.1064500>.*

*"I hope you will act on the suggestion*

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## Henry Sandford

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*contained in the accompanying letter to get Congress to provide you a larger Secret Service Fund.*

*I am determined, if it is possible, to get at the operations of these [Confederate] "commissioners" through their own papers, and the man specially occupied with that knows his business. How it will be done whether through a pretty mistress or an intelligent servant or a spying landlord is nobody's business; but I lay great stress on getting you full official accounts of their operations here!*

*It will be expensive. Your £600 will not last long if this is continued for a considerable period, but I count on your increasing it as wanted.*

*I intend on putting an agent or two on my own account on their fellow in Paris. The official agents don't do all I ask them to and the Chef de Police I has promised me one of their retired agents in the political department who shall be in relations with the office but not accountable to them for what I set him at.*

*If you do not approve my way of proceeding tell me so frankly. I go on the doctrine that in war as in love, everything is fair that will lead to success!*"

This was not ambiguous. Sandford was telling the Secretary of State that he intended to use bribery, infiltration, mail theft, and sexual entrapment to penetrate Confederate operations—and that it would be expensive.

Sandford was explicitly proposing bribery, infiltration, mail theft, and sexual entrapment—and requesting additional funds to do so. Seward did not object.

Through foreign nationals, Sandford intercepted correspondence, diverted contracts, identified shipbuilders, and occasionally sabotaged vessels. These acts were illegal under local law. San-

ford enjoyed diplomatic immunity; his agents did not. Corruption was intrinsic to the system.

"Sexpionage," as later generations would call it, was hardly novel. The Civil War had its own female operatives—Rose Greenhow, Belle Boyd, Ginnie Moon—who used intimacy to extract secrets. Sandford's casual reference to "a pretty mistress" shows he understood the same tools were available to him.

### Implications

There is substantial evidence indicating that the United States Government engaged in covert counterespionage through a network involving bribery, as well as mail and wire fraud, utilizing foreign operatives during the Civil War. Secretary of State William H. Seward, likely with the knowledge of President Lincoln, oversaw an intelligence and covert operation in Europe. His operations were conducted through individuals such as Thurlow Weed, Charles Francis Adams, and Henry Shelton Sandford, who served as the U.S. minister to Belgium. Sandford, in particular, was responsible for managing secret surveillance, courier networks, and propaganda efforts aimed at undermining Confederate diplomacy and arms procurement in Europe. 21st Century readers are likely not particularly surprised to learn this.

Had Sandford's network been exposed, the diplomatic consequences could have been severe. Britain and France maintained official neutrality; revelations of U.S. interference with correspondence, commerce, or the press could have triggered expulsions or demands for recall. Belgium, whose neutrality required delicate balance, might have objected strongly to its territory being used for clandestine operations.

Yet the Confederacy was engaged in its own covert diplomacy and arms procurement. Had Sandford's actions been revealed, Washington would have argued—credibly—that it was countering Southern subversion. The risk was real, but the calculation

proved correct.

If European governments were to uncover U.S. interference with private or diplomatic correspondence, it would be regarded as a significant violation of sovereignty. This could have led to the expulsion of U.S. diplomats (or at the very least, Sandford himself).

Both Britain and France maintained official neutrality. Following the Trent Affair, U.S. diplomacy was cast into doubt. Should Sandford's bribery, espionage against Confederate agents, and the use of press propaganda have been exposed, London and Paris might have charged the U.S. with breaching their neutrality. This could have jeopardized Adams' meticulous diplomacy in London, potentially increasing the likelihood of recognizing the Confederacy. Sandford's host nation might have objected to the use of its territory for clandestine operations.

The damage to the Union's moral standing could have been catastrophic for global opinion. The Lincoln administration framed the war as a moral battle against slavery and insurrection. If it were revealed that the U.S. was conducting covert influence operations—such as planting articles in newspapers, financing agents, or surveilling Confederate sympathizers—it could have undermined that moral assertion, portraying the Union as Machiavellian rather than principled. There would have been a significant risk to U.S. agents and sympathizers operating overseas. If Sandford's informants and intermediaries were to be exposed, they could have faced arrest or expulsion. This situation would have severely hindered the U.S. capacity to monitor Confederate arms acquisitions and blockade runners.

Consequently, the immediate repercussions would have included diplomatic embarrassment and a potential loss of influence in Europe. Should the Confederates' situation have improved, it is uncertain whether Britain's political stance might have

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*Civil War Re-enactors;  
America's Living Historians.*

## Henry Sandford

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shifted. They were undertaking a considerable risk, and it ultimately proved beneficial.

Following the war, Union leaders minimized or overlooked Sanford's covert involvement. The official narrative highlighted Lincoln's moral clarity and Adams' diplomatic resolve, rather than the obscure tactics that underpinned them. Thus, the justification was both practical at the time and discreetly suppressed afterward to maintain the Union's image as a principled power.

### Conclusion

Henry Shelton Sanford never commanded an army and never signed a famous treaty. His war was fought in post offices, telegraph rooms, shipyards, and newspaper offices. Through bribery, surveillance, and influence, he helped deny the Confederacy the foreign support it desperately needed. Had his activities been exposed, they might have damaged the Union's standing abroad. That

they remained secret helped preserve it.

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- U.S. Department of State. *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs* (Annual volumes, esp. 1861–1865). – Includes Sanford's and Adams' correspondence with Seward; you can see how carefully they worded reports to obscure covert activities.

Charles Francis Adams. *The Memoirs of Charles Francis Adams, 1835–1917*. – Adams reflects on his role in Britain and occasionally mentions the behind-the-scenes pressures, though cautiously.

### Secondary Works

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- Thomas, Benjamin P. & Hyman, Harold M. *Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War*. New York: Knopf, 1962. – While focused on Stanton, it provides context on the

Union's broader intelligence operations, including coordination with diplomats like Sanford.

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- Howard Jones, *Blue and Gray Diplomacy* (2010) — situates Weed's role in the broader Union diplomatic and covert strategy.
- Norman B. Ferris, *Desperate Diplomacy: William H. Seward's Foreign Policy, 1861* (1976) — covers Weed's involvement during the Trent Affair.
- U.S. State Department, *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs* (1861–62) — includes indirect references to Weed's activities, though sanitized.

