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Anna Surratt, the daughter of convicted Lincoln-conspirator Mary Surratt, begged for her Mother's life. All of her efforts were ignored.

CAUTION: The Links in this Chapter
Depict **Extremely** Graphic Material

Execution of the four convicted defendants was set for July 7, 1865, following the guilty verdicts reached on June 29th. Five members of the nine-man Military Commission (which had tried the case) sent a message to President Andrew Johnson recommending mercy for Mary Surratt:

The undersigned members of the Military Commission detailed to try Mary E. Surratt and others for the conspiracy and the murder of Abraham Lincoln, late President of the United States, do respectively pray the President, in consideration of the sex and age of the said Mary E. Surratt, if he can upon all the facts in the case, find it consistent with his sense of duty to the country to commute the sentence of death to imprisonment in the penitentiary for life.

President Johnson signed Surratt's death warrant. He later claimed no one had told him about the commutation request.

On the day of the execution, Anna Surratt went to the White House weeping and pleading for her mother's life. Had she been able to see the President, perhaps he would have granted clemency. President Johnson's good friend, Preston King, and Senator James Henry Lane turned Anna and her lawyers away. The executions would proceed as scheduled.

As the prisoners were taken to the place of hanging (where Ft. McNair stands today), the weather in Washington was unbearably hot. As he took his final walk, Lewis (Powell) Payne continued to maintain that Mrs. Surratt was innocent:

*Mrs. Surratt is innocent. She doesn't
deserve to die with the rest of us!*

Mary Surratt, who had spent the last night of her life with her daughter, knew her clemency requests and habeas corpus application had been denied. She would mount the scaffold where she could surely see awaiting coffins and open graves. Her last words were more immediate:

Please, don't let me fall!

General John F. Hartranft and his staff had been in charge of the prisoners. It was Hartranft who read the death sentences to the condemned while others made sure the trap doors would properly work.

Hoods were placed over the prisoners heads. Moments before the execution, the prisoners' ropes were checked. A drawing depicts the last seconds before the trap doors gave way. (Commentators at the Library of Congress have noted that the artist took liberties with the drawing since it is not clear that a priest was actually present at the execution.)

After the four prisoners were hanged, the crowd dispersed. There was nothing else to see that day. But controversy over the trial and executions was immediate and continuous.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/EXECUTION-Assassination-of-Abraham-Lincoln>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/EXECUTION-Assassination-of-Abraham-Lincoln>

Questions 2 Ponder

Was Mary Surratt Justly Tried, Convicted and Sentenced?

This lithograph depicts how the Lincoln-Conspiracy trial appeared from the viewpoint of the military commission (whose members were trying the case).

If five members of the nine-member Military Commission which tried Mary Surratt recommended mercy for her, to President Johnson, why didn't they—the deciders of the case—show her mercy themselves when they considered the case and the evidence?

President Johnson signed Mary Surratt's death warrant, later claiming that he did not know about the request for mercy. Do you believe him? Why, or why not?

What would cause Payne (Powell), the attempted assassin of Secretary of State Seward, to declare that Mrs. Surratt was innocent, just before he was hanged?

Media Stream



Anna Surratt - Daughter of Mary Surratt

Image of Anna Surratt, online courtesy the Surratt House Museum.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Anna-Surratt-Daughter-of-Mary-Surratt>

WASHINGTON, D.C.

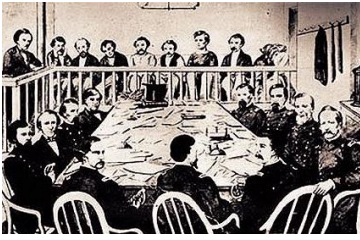


Ft. McNair - Map Locator

Map-locator image, online courtesy U.S. National Park Service (NPS).

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View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Ft.-McNair-Map-Locator>



Military Court in Session - Lincoln Conspiracy Trial

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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Lincoln Conspirators - Hooded before Hanging

Online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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EXECUTION

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