Quelling the Camp Douglas Conspiracies

In addition to fighting on the front lines, the Union army functioned as a domestic security agency to monitor and suppress Confederate sympathizers in the North.

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The plots to attack Chicago’s Camp Douglas prison camp during the Civil War are well known to historians. Scholars understand that Confederate authorities were eager to free thousands of their imprisoned soldiers held in Union prisoner-of-war (POW) camps located in the North. As well as replenishing their depleted ranks, Southern leaders aimed to release rebel soldiers on the Northern landscape to cause upheaval and panic. In their plan, armed Confederate sympathizers—Northerners who opposed President Abraham Lincoln’s administration of the war and his policies—would rise up, join with the freed rebel soldiers, and run riot in the North, especially in the Midwest. Together, rebel soldiers and insurrectionists would halt the Union war effort, divert federal troops to the North, and destroy Lincoln’s prospects for reelection. Of the several attempts made, the plots targeting Camp Douglas were the most daring. Confederate troops operating out of Canada under Captain Thomas Henry Hines slipped secretly into Chicago in August and November of 1864 to meet with local conspirators to plan attacks on the camp, located on the city’s South Side. However, both plots failed.¹

Historians have generally concluded that the plots collapsed due to the incompetence of Southern sympathizers who got cold feet at the last minute or inadvertently divulged their plans to government detectives. Moreover, historians argue that the plots involving Camp Douglas and other Midwestern camps posed little threat to the stability of the North and never had a chance of success. The plotters’ incompetence, their presumed small numbers, and the assumption that overwhelming Union military power would crush any uprising all figure in historians’ estimations. In hindsight, scholars have judged that the plots existed more in fear-mongering politicians’ imaginations than in reality;² but records housed in the National Archives and other repositories that have long been overlooked or ignored by historians point to different conclusions.
Founded in the fall of 1861 as a training camp and staging center for Union forces, Camp Douglas was named for Stephen A. Douglas, who donated the property just south of the city. By the middle of the war, it was converted to a POW camp. Pictured here are Confederate prisoners, c. 1863.
Confederate-sympathizing groups often communicated in code to preserve secrecy. This message sent between Order of the Sons of Liberty members is from the official court record of their trial in Indianapolis in 1865.

Contrary to historians’ assumptions, these records show that military officers and civilian authorities genuinely feared the prospect of large-scale revolutionary uprisings, so they closely investigated threats of insurrection in the Midwest. Officials received and credited numerous reports that secret organizations located in Midwestern states and boasting large memberships were in communication in Confederate agents to foment unrest in the North. Accordingly, officials worked diligently to uncover the plots and neutralize their threat. During the course of the Civil War, US Army commanders in Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, Indianapolis, Louisville, St. Louis, and elsewhere cooperated to investigate antigovernment conspiracies and break up plots. The Camp Douglas plots of August and November of 1864 were quashed because army officers shared information among themselves about the movements of rebel agents and their Northern collaborators. Their information came from turncoat rebel informers, spies hired to infiltrate secret groups or tail suspicious persons, and intercepted correspondence.

Military intelligence efforts in the Midwest arose haphazardly during the war, with no direction from officials in Washington, DC. Intelligence operations were mobilized in response to growing local threats to the federal government’s ability to prosecute the war. In 1861 and 1862, civilian and military officials saw the rise of secret organized groups in the North that vowed opposition to the war owing to their fear of Lincoln’s administration and hatred of its Republican agenda to abolish slavery and to centralize power in the federal government. Civil law enforcement efforts discovered the existence of these groups, which were tied to the Democratic Party and called by various names but were generally known as the Knights of the Golden Circle (KGC). Civil authorities, however, lacked the investigatory tools to prosecute them successfully in court. In 1863, responding to threats to the Union army’s ability to recruit and retain troops in the face of widespread disenchantedment with the war effort (especially Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation), military commanders hired civilian detectives to investigate armed organizations that encouraged, harbored, and protected deserters. They also had soldiers pose as deserters to infiltrate the armed groups. Also in that year, Congress passed the Enrollment Act that created a nationwide detective apparatus under the Provost Marshal General’s Bureau in the War Department. Its duty was to find and arrest deserters and draft dodgers. In this way, the Union army became a domestic security agency as its detectives roamed throughout the Midwest to investigate armed and organized resistance to the government. Army agents watched people and opened and read their private mail.

Late in 1863, army intelligence efforts scored their first major victories when they infiltrated secret groups and learned that the KGC had morphed into the Order

Charles Walsh was an Irish immigrant who became a successful businessman in Chicago. He served as the brigadier general of the local Sons of Liberty chapter.
of American Knights (OAK). This new secret organization, which was growing throughout the North with many thousands of members, planned attacks on prisoners-of-war camps in Ohio and Indiana. Union commanders shared this information among themselves and with Midwestern Republican governors. Acting on information from soldier spies who infiltrated the organization, officers arrested plotters in Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio, and in Covington, Kentucky, and secured indictments for conspiracy and treason in federal court. As the war continued into 1864, Democratic opposition to Lincoln increased in strength and the secret organizations grew in numbers. Military authorities maintained their vigil and continued to investigate conspiracies throughout the Midwest.

The conspirators’ and Confederates’ focus on releasing prisoners of war pointed attention to Camp Douglas, the sprawling former rendezvous and training camp for Union volunteers located in Chicago that had been converted to a prison camp to hold captured rebel enlisted men. The largest such camp in the Midwest, the prisoner population swelled to more than eight thousand, guarded by about eight hundred soldiers, by summer of 1864. Despite garrison commanders’ vigilant watch, rebel prisoners managed to escape the stockade individually or in small groups, so to prevent further escapes, guards received help from other commands. In May 1864, Union authorities in Kentucky successfully recaptured an escaped Camp Douglas prisoner. During interrogation, the prisoner divulged that he had been aided by the “copperheads of northern Ill[inois]” who gave horses and money to the escapees. The “principal instrument” of the escape effort was a Chicago man named Charles Walsh, who employed his daughter to play near the stockade walls and “slip in to the prisoners letters containing money & other articles.” Kentucky officers shared this information with Colonel Benjamin J. Sweet, commandant of Camp Douglas, but there is no evidence that he acted on the tip.

By the summer of 1864, army commanders and the governors of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois were in agreement that they faced a looming danger. Their spies reliably reported that the armed organizations (most of which now called themselves the Sons of Liberty) had grown stronger and bolder and planned coordinated uprisings in August. Most of the commanders and governors, however, feared that any move to arrest leading conspirators would prompt outbreaks of overwhelming violence that the army, with few troops available in the North, could not quell. Richard Yates, governor of Illinois, adamantly opposed any plan to arrest the known leading conspirators in the state without significant military reinforcements. Lincoln and the War Department initially ignored pleas for troops; the president was loath to weaken armies that were already bogged down in heavy fighting in the South. He finally relented, however, and sent some raw recruits to the Midwestern prisoner-of-war camps, including Camp Douglas. The reinforcements had an immediate effect. The arrival of troops in Indianapolis on the eve of a planned uprising to release Camp Morton prisoners on August 16 intimidated local plotters, who called off their attempt.
The east side and main entrance of Camp Douglas faced Cottage Grove Avenue. It was bounded to the north and south by Thirty-First and Thirty-Third Streets, respectively, and to the west by present-day Giles Avenue. Oil painting by Albert E. Meyers, 1864.
While reinforcements temporarily foiled Indiana conspirators, Union spies and detectives reported that Confederate authorities and leaders of the secret organizations remained determined to attack elsewhere. Important information came from Lieutenant Colonel Bennett H. Hill, the Union commander at Detroit, whose spies kept close watch on Confederate agents, escaped POWs, deserters, and draft dodgers who congregated across the border in Canada. In early August he reported to Major General Samuel P. Heintzelman, the commander of the multistate Northern Department headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, that a disgruntled Confederate officer, Major George W. Young, had divulged plans to foment an uprising in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention at the end of the month. Captain Thomas Henry Hines, a daring cavalry officer then in charge of Confederate secret operations in the North, was to command it. Hines and Confederate troops planned to slip into the United States from Canada in small groups and make their way to Chicago. There they would attack Camp Douglas with the help of local conspirators, who comprised five thousand armed men. The release of the prisoners “would be a signal for an outbreak in the states of Indiana and Illinois,” Young told Hill.⁣

Acting promptly, Heintzelman ordered Hill to share the information with Union Colonel Sweet, who immediately hired detectives to investigate the matter. The sleuths, however, failed to find the Confederates in the city. The colonel appears not to have acted on the information supplied him about Walsh and now, presented with Hill’s information, he dismissed an imminent threat. While a secret organization existed in the city, he noted, “I do not believe it to be armed” and its leaders did not plot “open armed hostility.”⁣ If they intended “mischief,” he wrote, “I have not yet been able to detect it.”⁣

While Sweet initially found little evidence of the plot, commanders at other posts provided information on the threat of violence in Chicago. The rebel turncoat Young provided additional details on Hines’s movements to Hill, who passed them on to Sweet. Their plot, planned for months, would be aided by “large accessions” of armed men from the city and region. The combined force of released captives and armed insurgents would fight their way to Kentucky and hold it for the Confederacy.⁣ Tidbits shared by officers in St. Louis, Indianapolis, and Lexington, Kentucky, also pointed to rebel action in Chicago during the Democratic convention.⁣ Moreover, the Provost Marshal General’s Bureau officer in Chicago, Captain William James, reported that local sources told of a plot to release prisoners and torch the city.⁣ The Union army commander in Springfield ordered Sweet to avoid provocation during the convention, but should an uprising occur, he was to punish the malefactors in “exemplary” fashion.⁣ Heintzelman’s headquarters ordered Sweet to watch the railroad stations for the arrival of Hines and his men; Hill forwarded Hines’s physical description.⁣ While troops were in short supply throughout the department, headquarters shifted an artillery battery from Columbus, Ohio, to reinforce Camp Douglas. In sum, military leaders took the threat seriously and shared information among themselves to defend against an uprising.

As Chicago began to overflow with thousands of Democratic delegates and visitors attending the convention, General Heintzelman received orders from the War Department to oversee Camp Douglas’s defense in person. He arrived by train late on August 29, the first day of the convention. The general did not attend the gathering, held in a purpose-built amphitheater on the lakefront, but inspected the camp and conferred with Sweet who now, in a pinch, could turn out about two thousand soldiers to repel attack. Heintzelman met with prominent Democratic leaders at his hotel, the Sherman House, and elsewhere. In conversation he learned, as he recorded in his private journal, “there’s a rumor that we have 5,000 troops. We may as well let them believe so.”⁣

The Democratic National Convention adjourned on September 2, delegates having chosen former Major General George B. McClellan to challenge President Lincoln. While they made many apoplectic speeches
condemning the Lincoln administration, no uprising occurred in the city during the event. Shortly afterward, the news of the capture of Atlanta, a major triumph for Union forces, reached the North. Back at headquarters in Columbus, Heintzelman mused in his journal: “What a pity [the news] did not occur while the democratic convention was in session. It would have been a bombshell in their camp. What a commentary such a remark is on their loyalty.”

What happened to the plot to release the rebel prisoners of war during the Democratic National Convention? All evidence indicates that the plotters were present and ready to attack. Hines and his Confederates had eluded detectives amid the masses of visitors in the city and had holed up in hotels. The prisoners, aware of the plan, were poised to attack the garrison. Leaders of the Sons of Liberty from neighboring states attending the convention also conferred in the city. But the local armed group led by Charles Walsh, who again used his daughter to smuggle communications to camp prisoners, begged off at the last minute. Hines met with Walsh twice during the convention and learned that the Chicagoans’ revolutionary zeal had waned. The cause: newspapers circulated rumors that Heintzelman had orders to monitor the convention and had brought reinforcements to that end. Press stories of troop trains passing through the city rippled through rebel-sympathizing ranks. Years later, one of the Confederate soldiers present in Chicago recalled: “It was soon rumored about that the Camp Douglas Garrison had been reinforced by 5,000 men.” Another remembered that the rumor “had its effect upon the leaders of the Sons of Liberty.”

Hines’s second-in-command derisively termed the local revolutionaries timid “theorists.” Lacking local firepower, Hines postponed the attack. He sent most of his troops back to Canada, while he and twenty-five Confederates boarded trains for downstate Illinois, scattered into several towns, and quietly organized local groups to plan another attempt.

The collapse of the plot to attack Camp Douglas during the convention was due to a combination of factors. First and foremost, the rumor of heavy reinforcements at the camp quite reasonably gave local revolutionaries pause. While armed, numerous, and led by bold Confederate officers, they felt themselves no match against what they believed was a powerful garrison. Second, the Union army’s intelligence efforts—especially Young’s disclosures to Colonel Hill—afforded commanders time to prepare, strengthen their dispositions, and present a bold front that fooled local observers. For historians to echo disgusted Confederate soldiers and judge the conspirators as reckless “theorists” is perhaps unjust when Union commanders made every effort, with their prior knowledge, to deter or defeat an assault.

Situated on Michigan Avenue near Twelfth Street (now Roosevelt Road), the convention amphitheater was two hundred feet in diameter and could accommodate sixteen thousand people. Lithograph by Charles Shober, c. 1864
After the plot to attack Camp Douglas during the convention collapsed, the once-complacent Colonel Sweet became more vigilant about the threat coming from armed pro-Confederate groups in Chicago. In the following weeks, he used detectives, informers, and spies more extensively and effectively to monitor both the prisoners within the camp and local opponents of the war. His extra efforts paid dividends. Sweet reported to his superiors that he possessed names and information on "the Sons of Liberty in this city and state" and had discovered their "channels" of communication with the prisoners. He also revealed that his spies inside Camp Douglas had foiled a plan by prisoners to overpower the guard on September 19, timed to coincide with the SS Philo Parsons plot by Confederate agents to attack the USS Michigan, the sole naval warship on the Great Lakes, and free rebel officers on Johnson's Island, the POW camp on Lake Erie near Sandusky, Ohio. Having been caught unprepared before the Democratic convention in August, Sweet was not to be outdone again.

As autumn approached and Union forces continued their advances into rebel-held regions of the South, Confederate agents continued to target Camp Douglas and other prisoner-of-war camps to free rebel troops and open a new front in the war. Union intelligence got wind of these efforts and pursued their leads. In early November, Colonel Sweet obtained reports from several sources of continued attempts on Camp Douglas. Detectives reported that large numbers of southern Illinois men (recruited by Hines and his Confederates) were arriving on trains, and that Confederate officers had been identified in Chicago hotels. Agents working for other Union commands also tracked rebel officers to Chicago and shared information with Sweet. Obtaining permission from the War Department to employ prisoners as spies, on November 3 camp officers asked prisoner John T. Shanks, a Texan captured during Brigadier General John Hunt Morgan's raid in Ohio, to gather information about the Confederate officers in the city. Posing as an escaped prisoner, Shanks inquired at the house of prominent city judge Buckner S. Morris and his wife, Mary, both of whom were known to the Union army for having aided prisoners. The judge told him that an uprising would soon occur in the city. Shanks reported this to camp commanders and on November 6 went to the Richmond House hotel, where he met Confederate officers he had served with in Morgan's command. Some of the officers revealed information.

In June and July of 1863, John Hunt Morgan led about two thousand Confederate soldiers through Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio to wreak havoc. This group of captured Morgan's Raiders, pictured here at Camp Douglas in 1864, was infamous for their repeated escape attempts.
Like many active Copperheads in Chicago, Judge Buchner Morris was a southern migrant. Morris served as mayor of Chicago from 1838 to 1839.

Richmond House stood at the northwest corner of Michigan Avenue and South Water Street. It was conveniently located across from the Great Central Station, the entry point for many Southern sympathizers.

about an imminent attempt on Camp Douglas on election day, November 8, when Hines would lead local armed conspirators in an attack. The freed prisoners, equipped with guns by the local secret organization, would then rampage through the city and state.23

Armed with information of an impending attack, on the evening of November 6 Colonel Sweet dispatched a messenger by rail to Springfield to alert his superior, Brigadier General John Cook, deeming a telegraph mes-

sage insecure. He warned that the city was full of “suspicious characters,” including Captain Hines and other Confederates who had been in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention. The situation was too dangerous to await orders, he reported; he intended “to arrest these officers, if possible, before morning. The head gone we can manage the body.” He also planned to arrest several “prominent citizens” involved in the plot, “of which the proof is ample.”24

Sweet lost no time. In the early morning hours of Monday, November 7, troops under his orders from the camp garrison marched into the city and arrested Confederate officers in the Richmond House and several civilians in their houses, among them Judge Morris and Charles Walsh. Sweet identified Walsh as the local “Brigadier General” of the Sons of Liberty; Morris was its treasurer.25 At 3:00 A.M. troops surrounded and raided the house where Hines was known to be, but he eluded capture by hiding in the bed of his hosts. During the search, the lady of the house “complained of being quite sick and kept her bed all day,” thus shielding him in the bed covers. Hines slipped away and out of the city only when the troops guarding the house were relieved the following evening.26

His other collars made, Sweet felt secure enough to telegraph Cook to report the arrest of “noted conspirators.” Cook feared that Camp Douglas was still threatened with attack on election night and requested reinforcements from other Midwestern commands.27 Among other help, four companies of troops arrived by train from Indianapolis. In the meantime, as the city awoke on November 7 to learn the astonishing news, Sweet’s troops fanned out across the city and seized large quantities of firearms and ammunition at the house and livery stables of Charles Walsh: hundreds of loaded revolvers and shotguns that were to arm the freed prisoners. Using the seized guns, military commanders equipped an ad hoc militia cavalry to patrol the city in the following days. Troops seized more records of the Sons of Liberty, “some of them valuable,” wrote Sweet, and showing “the intents and purposes of the organization.”28 During the next several days, Captain William James of the Provost Marshal General’s Bureau and his agents arrested and interrogated ninety-six men, confirming that the plot aimed to liberate the Confederate prisoners.29 Downstate, provost marshal deputies also captured men who had eluded city dragnets, eliciting confessions of involvement in the Camp Douglas plot.30

Military and federal authorities put the Chicago conspirators on trial by military commission, which took place at department headquarters in Cincinnati in early 1865. The trial served as a sequel to the military commission trials held in Indianapolis from September 1864 to January 1865. There, the Union army tried Indiana
leaders of the Sons of Liberty for conspiracy to release prisoners of war at Camp Morton and raise revolt. Occurring during the fall election season, Republican leaders in Washington, DC, clearly intended the Indianapolis trials (involving Indiana Democratic leaders) to influence voters’ attitudes and equate Democrats with traitors. Republicans undoubtedly succeeded, winning many states handily. Taking place long after the fall elections, the Cincinnati trial of the Chicago conspirators—including Buckner Morris, Charles Walsh, and several Confederate officers—did not have immediate electoral propaganda value. But the widely reported trial, based on the evidence of Union spies and informers, helped cripple Democrats for years by portraying them as the party of pro-Confederate conspirators.31

The careful investigations arising from genuine concern about large-scale insurrection and violence allowed Union commanders to successfully break up the November 1864 attempt to attack Camp Douglas. Intelligence sharing among different military commanders in the region again proved decisive in affording the Union army time to move scarce troops and prepare defenses. Moreover, quick action based on reliable information allowed Colonel Sweet to arrest rebel officers poised to lead local armed revolutionaries. Additionally, in September Sweet’s new vigilance in detecting covert activities in Chicago and Camp Douglas headed off another attempt to break out of the prison in conjunction with the SS Philo Parsons plot. In all three instances, intelligence efforts prevented violent upheaval in Chicago, averted additional bloodshed in the North, and stopped the creation of a new Northern front. Newly uncovered archival evidence shows that during the war the US Army engaged in extensive domestic espionage to counteract the existence of powerful and widespread underground organizations in the North.32 The plots in Chicago were part of a larger effort throughout the Midwest to subvert the Union war effort and help the Confederacy win, but the army’s concerted intelligence efforts defeated the conspirators’ movements and helped preserve the Union.

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ILLUSTRATIONS | Illustrations are from the Chicago History Museum, unless otherwise noted. 27, ICHi-01800; 28 top left: ICHi-76904, top right: ICHi-76903, bottom: ICHi-51129; 29, top: Library of Congress, Brady-Handy Photograph Collection, LC-BH83-1765 <P&P> [P&P], bottom: ICHi-51131; 30–31, ICHi-62614; 32, ICHi-69905; 33, ICHi-01981; 35, ICHi-01805; 36, top: ICHi-69904, bottom: ICHi-74478; 37, ICHi-51128.

FOR FURTHER READING | For an edited version of the Indianapolis trials records, see Benn Pitman, ed., The Trials for Treason at Indianapolis, Disclosing the Plans for Establishing a Northwestern Confederacy: Being the Official Record of the Trials Before the Military Commission (Cincinnati, OH: Moore, Wilstach & Baldwin, 1865). For more on how politicians, soldiers, and civilians dealt with disloyalty during the Civil War, see William A. Blair, With Malice toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).
ENDNOTES


2 Older scholarship that credited the existence of collaboratives between Confederate secret agents and Democratic conspirators in the North to release Camp Douglas prisoners includes Mayo Fesler, "Secret Political Societies in the North During the Civil War," *Indiana Magazine of History* 14, no. 3 (September 1918): 183–286; George Fort Milton, *Abraham Lincoln and the Fifth Column* (New York: Colliers, 1942); and Wood Gray, *The Hidden Civil War: The Story of the Copperheads* (New York: Viking, 1942). Amid post-World War Two anti-Communist "witch hunts" of the 1940s through the 1960s, a revisionist view arose challenging the older view and arguing that wartime evidence and accusations of conspiracy and treason were fabrications concocted by Republicans and ambitious army officers to smear their Democratic rivals. The leading voice in this revisionist argument was historian Frank L. Klement, whose works focused on rehabilitating the ant-war "Copperhead" Democrats from what he considered were Republican slanders. See Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), and Klement, *Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984). Klement’s view is widely accepted today. In his excellent study of Chicago in the Civil War-era, Theodore J. Karamanski takes a middle ground in the dispute, but leans toward the revisionist view in arguing that Chicago conspirators were "inept" and delusional when they believed that they could succeed. Also, he downplays the revolutionary aims of the conspirators. See Karamanski, *Rally Round the Flag: Chicago and the Civil War* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1993; reprinted, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 185–223.


4 Towne, *Surveillance and Spies in the Civil War*, 116–73.

5 Captain Stephen E. Jones to commanding officer, Camp Douglas, 6 May 1864, RG 393, Part I, District of Kentucky Records, E 2239, Press Copies of Letters Sent by Capt. Stephen E. Jones, vol. 2, 403, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA). "Copperheads" was an epithet given to northern Democrats who opposed the Lincoln administration war policies; some of them supported the southern rebellion. For a study of their significant power during the war, see Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

6 Lieutenant Colonel Bennett H. Hill to Captain Carroll H. Potter, 8 August 1864, RG 393, Part III, District of Michigan Records, E 327, Press Copies of Letters Sent, 111–13, NARA.

7 Colonel B. J. Sweet to Potter, 12 August 1864, RG 393, Part III, District of Illinois Records, E 196, Letters Received, box 1, NARA.

8 Sweet to Brigadier General Halbert E. Paine, 23 August 1864, RG 393, Part III, E 196, box 1, NARA.

9 Hill to Sweet, 16 August 1864, RG 393, Part III, E 196, box 1, NARA.


11 Captain William James to Lieutenant Colonel James Oakes, 19 August 1864, RG 110, Provost Marshal General’s Bureau Records, E 5382, Letters Received from District Provost Marshals, box 3, National Archives and Records Administration, Great Lakes Region, Chicago, Illinois (hereafter NARA-GLR).

12 District of Illinois Special Orders 8, August 27, 1864, RG 393, Part I, Northern Department Records, E 3349, Letters Received, box 2, NARA.

13 Hill to Sweet, 31 August 1864, RG 110, E 5897, Letters Sent by the Acting Assistant Provost Marshal General, Michigan, vol. 5, 73–74, NARA-GLR.


15 Journal entry of September 3, 1864, Heintzelman Papers, LC.

16 Towne and Heiser, eds., "Everything is fair in war," 95.


18 Castleman, *Active Service*, 146.

19 Towne and Heiser, eds., "Everything is fair in war," 96.


22 Thomas H. Keefe, “How the Northwest Was Saved: A Chapter from the Secret Service Records of the Civil War,” Everybody’s Magazine 2 (January, 1900): 89. Keefe was a minor government functionary whom Sweet hired to perform detective work in the fall of 1864. His account is self-aggrandizing. See also Keefe, The Great Chicago Conspiracy of 1864 (Chicago: Desplains Press, 1898). See also Edmund Kirke, “The Chicago Conspiracy,” Atlantic Monthly 16, no. 93 (July 1865), 113. Kirke was the nom de plume of writer J. R. Gilmore, who clearly had access to government records and officials in writing his account. Another Chicago man, a homeopathic physician, served authorities as an informer. His postwar accounts of his exploits are unreliable. See I. Winslow Ayer, The Great Northwestern Conspiracy in All Its Startling Details (Chicago: Rounds and James, 1865) and The Great Treason Plot in the North during the War (Chicago: U.S. Publishing, 1893).

23 George A. “Lightning” Ellsworth detailed in his 1882 memoir that once freed and armed, the Camp Douglas prisoners were to destroy all railroad lines leading in and out of Chicago except the tracks leading to Rock Island, Illinois, where federal troops held thousands more Confederate prisoners. “A detail of 2500 men were to start for [Rock Island] as soon as the camp Douglas prisoners were released. The Rock Island prisoners were to have been brought to Chicago to form a junction with the Douglas prisoners at that point.” Mounted, the rebels then would have marched south. See Towne and Heiser, eds., “‘Everything is fair in war,’” 102.


25 Sweet to Cook, 7 November 1864, ibid., 1082.

26 Towne and Heiser, eds., “‘Everything is fair in war,’” 102–3.

27 Cook to Potter, 7 November 1864, RG 393, Part I, Northern Department Records, E 3350, Telegrams Received, NARA.


32 Historian Joan M. Jensen posits that during the American Civil War the Army was largely uninvolved in internal security efforts. See Jensen, Army Surveillance in America, 1775–1980 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991). Her research, however, did not delve deeply into archival records of the Army’s intelligence efforts in the North during the rebellion.