
The Turner-Baker Papers collect documents dealing with questionable or illegal activities during the Civil War. This set, along with the Lincoln Assassination Suspects collection, also on microfilm, provide many of the insights or facts reported in Leonard Guttridge and Ray A. Neff’s *Dark Union*.

Without a doubt, this letter indicates that James W. Boyd was, as described by Guttridge and Neff, a Confederate soldier with certain knowledge and skills, at least in his own words, that he believed could be turned to good use by Edwin Stanton as a secret member of the detective force which reported to him as Secretary of War. The letter details these claims in great detail.

Except for an indication by “sic” to show that the name “Van Dorn” has been spelled hastily as “Vandon,” there are no indications when Boyd has misspelled a word (he spells “secretary” as “secratary,” for example). Similarly, he sometimes omits punctuation or uses punctuation incorrectly. In any case, Boyd’s way of indicating a comma or period are so close that it is not always clear what he intended. I have done my best to make sensible interpretations, but regardless of whether my choice is correct or not, I believe understanding will be unaffected by any incorrect interpretations of punctuation that I have made in the transcription. James Boyd is direct and uncomplicated in his style. His intention to be a spy for the Union is clear.

I have chosen to ignore most of Boyd’s capitalizations, since I presume these would have been for emphasis. Everything else is as it appears in the original document.

The images of the original handwritten letter to Stanton are followed by the transcription. For easier comparison, I suggest that the reader print out the document and the transcript for side-by-side use.

David E. Vancil, PhD
Curator and Department Head
July 13, 2006

Transcription rev. June 5, 2007: "Donelston" changed to "Pemberton"
Dear General, Hon. S. M. Stanton Secretary of War,

In September of 1863, I made a written statement to Gen. W. W. Wood and the Hon. Lt. Col. Dana Assistant Secretary of War, concerning the capture of Mr. Calvin Jones Box, with the assistance of Capt. Price of the San Jose's Army. In the absence of Mr. B. S. Davis, I had no one to write to the statement referring a story done by the New York Daily of a Federal Officer, upon the rebellion of a slave, upon the oath of Mr. Cook and all protection of the Government. I would that statement show you how all秘密 to the act of the act being done by an act of your Army. Notwithstanding it is done by the letter, yet it is not known. In particular of the story, whose the speaker does prove, the same is a secret, but not a particular secret of my own. Confide here, being here of importance, but from what you wish must not or should not be done by you. That was the fact, upon the Rebel Army, Gen. W. told me, that here is mine a Company of his men, to come with him, there are other men who will be that they did not come. This is mine some of the officers present in the matter and to get this name and description, separate you could arrive at all of the facts without ever writing to the paper that you do not write to the papers that you do not write to the papers that you do not write to the papers that you do not write to the papers that you do not write to the papers that you do not write to the papers that you do not write to the papers that you do not write to the papers that you do not write to the papers that you do not write to the papers.
Until I am restored to Command of all my troops in North Miss., Secas. at the Battle of Corinth, after which Genl. Dunwoody came and took Command, and Genl. Van Dorn was made Chief of Gravelly. I know every Man in East Tenn. and North Miss. I know every Man that goes from Corinth to Paducah through the Inland Water. I know who has been doing these, and give you information how it is all done. I know where Calle, Thung and Gurney is stationed, and get by interest and in fact anything connected with it, also all the Cotton dealers and how they pay for it, and how they get it, and how much they get in large quantities of particular kind. Now the fact is simply this: that if I had ever been a Democrat or Seceshism you might have pushed me longer out and you never would have got your hands out of me.

Another thing: I have been Court Martialled twice, and I have a ticket of silence for that. How if you will give me your confidence and let me manage matters in West Tenn. and Kentucky West of the Line, River. I will take ensuing you that I have the energy, and capacity to render invaluable service to the Government, but my name must be kept out of Newspapers. I must go simply as a Citizen or a Presbyterian Soldier. With a willingness to do to the Commanding officers of that department for Genl. Patton's place in peddler of all sorts who can manage affairs with skillfully that shall never be known in the matter. And also another fact that there is no answer made that will require me listening to appearance of all this, and that I am satisfied the case above.
Respectfully Submitted, I hold that in good faith, should need arise, or, the necessity, my reasons for not having been a Government Retalicer or had that before the war, I had made considerable reputation in that line, and if it was known that I was in it before, I could not get the Kepi again through out the country. Another reason is that I could let it wear the belief very safely, and that that, according to the issue per formed, had my health. I consider the more than any other. More than likely it lives but few years, and mine will not stand. This closes the State. The reason for urging the necessity to the Resolution that says it's dead and is in need of what, get living up. Whaley not likely able to support themselves, that would be a good base for me to remain at home — and perhaps I would in the country. If there is a question here, ask — let me off you please hear from you. Sincerely your, 

Jan. 17 1863

If this petition is not accepted, please lend me also all the statements. That you have of mine. I wish to know whether I can or have an interview with you. I cannot write all that I should like to say I have now for me. I am not here. I am not here. This officer refuses to have friends or relatives that the or hear of this matter.
Honl. E. W. Stanton Secretary of War,

Sir I made a written statement to Col W. P. Wood and the Honl. C. A. Dana Assistant Secretary of War, concerning the capture of Holly Springs, Miss. with the garrison and stores, it was (as you have in the statement referred to above) done by the treachery of a federal officer, upon the condition of a release upon taking the oath of allegiance and full protection by the Government I made this statement. I knew that you were all surprised at such an act being done by an officer of your Army. Nevertheless it is true to the letter, yet I do not know the particulars of the trade. Bonner the scout does know, he Bonner is a shrewd, intelligent man and a particular friend of mine. I can control him, bring him here if necessary, but to prove what you wish must not or should not be done by any one that has belonged to the Rebel Army. Col. W. told me that there was nine companies of his regt. to come with him; I have forgotten why he told me that they did not come. Bonner knows some of the officers concerned in the matter and to get their names and secure them & keep them separate you could arrive at all of the facts without ever making it known to the public that you got your information from me or any other person ever in the Rebel service. He Col. W. stayed with me in my room at Granada two days & nights. I would here ask your attention to what I shall propose and also a speedy answer. I was in charge of the scouts & Secret Service men of the Pemberton Army from the time Bragg left Tupelo for Ky. I remained at Gen. Villepigues until Genl. Vandon [sic] took command of all the troops in North Miss. I was at the Battle of Corinth after which Genl. Pemberton came and took command and Genl. Van Dorn was made Chief of Cavalry. I know every prominent man in West Tennessee and North Miss. I know every hog path from Corinth to Paducah, Memphis, Tupelo, Granada. I know who has been smuggling and who gives information & how it is all done I know where cattle sheep and grain is deposited to be got by Forrest, and in fact, everything connected with the Army. Also the cotton dealers and how they pay for it. And how goods get out in large quantities of particular kinds. Now, the fact is simply this, that if I had ever been a Democrat or Secessionist you might have pulled my tongue out and you never would have got one word out of me. Another thing I have been court martialed twice and I have a little score to settle for that. Now if you will give me your confidence and let me manage matters in West Tenn & Kentucky west of the Tenn River I will soon convince you that I have the energy and capacity to render invaluabl service to the Government, but my name must be kept out of newspapers; I must go simply as a citizen or a paroled soldier, with a written protection to the command officer of that department, for I will put him in possession of all facts or at least manage arrests so skillfully that I will never be known in the matter. And also another fact I will have no arrests made that will require my testimony or appearance at all. And I will make no failures to convict on ample and respectable testimony. I hold that a good detective should never make arrests, or be a witness. My reasons for not being known as a government detective is first that before the war I had made a considerable reputation in that line, and if it was known that I was in your service I could not get the ropes again throughout the country—another reason is that I could not wear my scalp very safely. I would expect pay according to the service performed. I know that I could do more than
any other man. I have lived in Jackson 40 years and am well acquainted throughout the state. My reason for urging an answer to this proposition is that my wife is dead and have seven children, that are living upon charity—not being able to support themselves. That would be a good excuse for me to remain at home—and I could travel over the country without a question being asked—let me if you please hear from you immediately & oblige.

Jas. W. Boyd

PS

If this proposition is not accepted please send it back also all the statements that you have of mine. I wish to know whether I could have an interview with you. I cannot write all that I would like to say. I have now I am fearful written more than I ought to have done for I do not know but that the officer referred to has friends or relatives that see or hear of this matter.

J.W.B.