

## President and prize-winner was a bull moose

*Greenwich Time, October 21, 2009*  
*By Lewis E. Lehrman*

On Oct. 14, 1912, Theodore Roosevelt was campaigning for president in Milwaukee, Wisconsin when he was shot in the chest. John Schrank, an anarchist and would-be assassin fired his .38 revolver as Roosevelt paused outside the Hotel Gilpatrick to wave to the crowd. Schrank was quickly seized, the former president seemed unfazed, and local doctors quickly ruled that his wound was superficial.

Rather than disappoint the 10,000 people who were waiting for him to speak, the bleeding Roosevelt continued by car to the Milwaukee Auditorium. There, he began his speech: "Friends I shall ask you to be as quiet as possible. I don't know whether you fully understand that I have just been shot, but it takes more than that to kill a bull moose."

Fortunately for Roosevelt, a steel eyeglass case slowed the bullet enough to keep it from penetrating his lungs. The container for his spectacles was in the same pocket as the folded speech which Roosevelt was to deliver. He displayed the bloody manuscript to the crowd, which he then addressed for nearly an hour and a half before going to the hospital. Doctors discovered the bullet had lodged in his chest but decided against removing it. It would remain embedded there for the rest of Roosevelt's life.

Even TR's loss to Democrat Woodrow Wilson in the three-way presidential election in November did not slow down the man who started life as a sickly, near-sighted, asthmatic child. He took to heart his father's exhortation: "Theodore, you have the mind but you have not the body, and without the help of the body the mind cannot go as far as it should. You must make your body." The 11-year-old boy responded: "I'll make my body."

The 40-year-old hero of the Spanish-American War would give a speech in 1899 in which the Roughrider proclaimed "not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife" that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph."

A year after his 1912 presidential loss, an expedition to the Amazon and a near-lethal bout of malaria almost did to Roosevelt what an assassin could not. Despairing of recovery and escape from the Amazon wilderness, TR almost took his own life. The restless Roosevelt had been the first American president to journey, as president, outside its borders. He went to Panama in 1906 to witness the Canal construction he had championed. Shortly after he left the presidency in 1909, Roosevelt took an extended safari to Africa.

Perhaps Roosevelt's first public act had been to witness from a second floor window the New York funeral procession of President Abraham Lincoln on April 25, 1865. Teddy was just six years old. Four decades later, President Roosevelt's secretary of state would be John Hay, who had been Lincoln's 26-year-old assistant secretary in 1865. Just before Roosevelt's 1905 inauguration, Hay sent the president a ring that contained a strand of Lincoln's hair. Hay, whose health was fading and who would die a few months later, requested: "Please wear it tomorrow; you are one of the men who most thoroughly understand and appreciate Lincoln."

Roosevelt replied: "Surely no other President, on the eve of his inauguration, has ever received such a gift from such a friend. I am wearing the ring now; I shall think of it and you as I take the oath

tomorrow. I wonder if you have any idea what your strength and wisdom and sympathy, what the guidance you have given me and the mere delight in your companionship, have meant to me these three and a half years?"

Together, Hay and Roosevelt had developed an impressive partnership in international affairs. At the beginning of the administration of President William McKinley, Roosevelt had been assistant secretary of the Navy, a job he used to modernize the American Navy, and Hay had been named ambassador to Great Britain. The Spanish American War - which Hay dubbed that "splendid little war" -- made a hero of Roosevelt in the charge up San Juan Hill in Cuba. It made Hay secretary of state, in which post he presided over the Treaty of Paris that ended the conflict in 1898.

When McKinley was assassinated in 1901, Vice President Roosevelt became president. He would become the first sitting president to win the Nobel Peace Prize -- for his arbitration of differences between Russia and Japan. As Roosevelt had said in 1899, "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in that grey twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

Lewis E. Lehrman, a Greenwich resident, is co-founder of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History and author of "Lincoln at Peoria: The Turning Point" (Stackpole Books, 2008).