

THE CAPTURE OF JEFF DAVIS

As told by John William Linsley, 4th Michigan Calvary

I have read so many times in the paper they were the last one left that helped capture Jeff Davis, President of the Southern Confederacy, so I thought I would write the part I took or performed in the capture.

We were in Camp in Macon, Georgia, and this was a Sunday. Ordered to pack up and march, the boys thought we were going home. The order did not come until about five o'clock, the bugle sounded "Boots and Saddles" that meant to get out and march. We saddled up and started. Some said this is not the way home, we are going Southwest. We marched all night, stopped in the morning and fed our horses and get breakfast and then started again. Marched all day, went into camp at night in the pine woods and I was detailed horse guard. We had a thunder shower. Lightning struck a number of trees and killed two horses. The horses were very restless and I did not get no chance to sleep. The next morning, just after daylight, we started again. Marched until about two o'clock in the afternoon. We stopped to make coffee and rest a little. We mounted our horses and started again. Went on about half mile. We came into a town called Abbeyville, it was the County seat. We turned there and went East, went about two miles. We turned out and thought we were going into camp but we soon found out different.

An Orderley came from headquarters, he wanted thirteen men from Co. L to report to headquarters. When the Orderley Sargent came to make the detail one of our boys by the name of Wm. West he said he was sick and was not able to go and I knew he was. I told him if he had got to go I would go in his place. I fell in with the rest of the boys that was detailed to go and report to headquarters. At this time regiment was all together. As soon as we reported, Pritchard took one hundred twenty eight and started on the march.

He had a few officers with him. Marched until sundown and then fed our horses in a mill. Started right out again and marched until about half past two or three in the morning then we went into a little town named Irwinville and stopped. I dismounted and layed down side the road. There was a house about twenty feet from me. Some of the boys went into the house to get something to eat. The old woman got up. She thought our boys was Reb they not ought to serve her that way for she had her time taking care of them, the sick and wounded. She had just got home from Richmond. She said if the boys did not behave she would in the morning have an officer come down and arrest them. Prichard heard what she said and he went into the house.

He found out by this women and a darkey where the camp was, and he thought this camp must be the one he was looking for and took this darkey for a guide with him. Prichard came out, ordered to mount their horses. We started. How far we went I don't know, I fell asleep on my horse. They came to a halt, my horse keep right on. Prichard said where are you going, John and that woke me up and I was right in with a couple of boys that I knew. They belong to Co. E.

What they stopped for was a detail on the flank. Prichard found out by this darkey how the camp was situated so he sent their men out on the flank so if any tried to get out they would get them. We stopped there a few minutes and it was coming daylight and Pritchard ordered us to get our guns ready, and charge.

We were in a pine woods. We charged about twenty rods and come right into camp. John Hines and Charlie Tyler and myself went into a tent and no one was up in this tent there was one man and two women. The man was on the South side and the women on the West side so their feet came together. The old man rose up to see what was going on.

"I surrender" he said and reached down in the bed and got a revolver and handed it to John Hines. We did not know who they were and some of the boys knew who they were after and this proved to be Jeff Davis and the women proved to be his wife and her sister. We did not know it at the time we went out of the tent.

Just as we got out into the road bang, bang went the guns about 40 rods up the road and they kept a going all excited. Prichard ordered us to fall in. We did and went up the road. The boys that went out on the flank met the first Wisconsin and asked them who they were and they said you are the son bitches we're after and fired on our boys and then the firing commenced in general.

Prichard saw how it was to fall back and dismount. Then we formed in line and then we went into the fight. I fell in behind a pine tree. You could see them dodging from one tree to another. I had fired two shots and was putting in a load in my gun when they hollered cease firing. You are firing on your own men. We had two killed and three wounded. They proved to be the first Wisconsin and first Ohio. They had seven wounded and then we went back to the camp.

Some of the boys was getting a barrel out of a wagon. They called for me to help and it proved to be a barrel of whiskey. We soon made a hole in it and I was filling my canteen when Frank Carpenter came rushing out. "Say Bill we have got old Jeff" and I spoke up, "Hell we have" and said, "Where is he?" Right where the crowd is. I rushed up, there he was. The same old man that was in the tent with the women. He was giving our boys like the devil and our boys was hooting at him. Mrs. Davis and her sister rushed out into the ring and said, "Boys, you must not irritate the Pres. He is a courageous man and may hurt some of you". And then we cheered him again. Just then Prichard rode up to see what was going on and Jeff Davis turned to him and asked if he was the Commanding officer here. He said he was. The he (Jeff) said, "You're too good looking a man to be Captain of a band of highwaymen meddling with peaceful citizens traveling through the country." Prichard turned to him and asked him, "Who may I have the honor of calling you". The he (Prichard) said, "I will call you Jeff Davis". "That is my name". This was the first that Prichard knew that he had got Jeff Davis.

Just at this time some one touched me on the shoulder. I turned around to see who it was and it was Charlie Tyler. "Bill, John Kline has been killed." I spoke up and said, "My God, is that so. Where is he?" "He was over where we formed in line a fighting. He was shot in the mouth, come right out the back of his head." Captain Hudson just rode up and he says take out what things he has in his pockets. We took out Jeff Davis revolver, the one Jeff gave him when he surrendered and his pocket book and some other trinkets. We spread his blanket over him saying we would come back and get him and went to the camp and as I got back there I met Sargent Ben Colf. "I have been looking for you for half and hour". "No you ain't for I have not been gone ten minutes." "I want you to go with me for Prichard has ordered me to report at Abbyville to Major Hathway that they had got Jeff Davis and that they would be there as quick as he could."

It was 25 miles there. We started right out. There was four of us, Ben Colf, George Nagelle, Perry J. Davis, J.W. Linsley. Got there about one o'clock in the afternoon. I do not know what took place in our camp after we went away only what they tell. But some of them said when we was fighting with the first Wisconsin that Jeff tried to get away. Prichard had put a guard around the camp. Mrs. Davis stepped out of the tent asked if they would allow her Mother to go down to the brook and get a pail of water. The brook was about 4 rods from the tent and the guard said yes. As he (Jeff) walked out he had on a riding dress and a shawl over his head, he looked like an old woman. As he walked along his spurs picked up his dress behind and showed his boots and the guard stopped him and made him to back to the tent.

After Prichard got to Abbeyville we camped there that night. Next morning we started for Macon. The second day out I was detailed as guard over Jeff. He was in an ambulance. I rode right the hind wheel, had my gun in my lap ready to shoot.

It had been heard that the citizens was going to rise and take Jeff away from us and we were ordered if anything happened like that to shoot Jeff the first thing. We talked with him and he told us all about his trying to get away. When he started after a pail of water he was going right by his horse, cut the halter and jump on him and skip. If he had done that he would of got away. He would run the risk of being killed or captured.

We marched and at night they turned him over to some other guards. Next day marched all day and then arrived at Macon and then Prichard went on to Washington with Jeff and party we captured.

This is a true statement of the part I took in the capture of Jeff Davis.

Mr. J. W. Linsley, Co. L (John William)
4th Michigan Calvary
Hopkins
Allegan County
Michigan.

John William Linsley Born August 29, 1843 died
Born at Geanga Co. Ohio.
Married Lydia Chamberlin born in 1849 at Green Co. New York on September 6, 1868 at Wayland,
Mich.

Parents: John Parkman Linsley born Feb 1, 1819 and married Dec. 17, 1840
Ann Eliza Button Linsley born March 11, 1819.

Children: Edgar S. Linsley born Dec. 4, 1841
John William Linsley born Aug. 29, 1843
Ellen Jane Linsley born Nov. 28, 1845
Emma Eliza Linsley born Oct. 1, 1847
James Ebenezer Linsley born June 28, 1850