ACCOUNT
MAY 1865

The capture of Jefferson Davis and others
Head Quarters 4th Michigan Cavalry

Washington D.C., May 26, 1862.

To Mr. Stanton,
Secretary of War,
Washington D.C.,

Sir,

I have the honor to report that in obedience to orders received from General H.V. Milroy, Commanding Division, I left Mason's Sta at eight o'clock P.M. on the 31st in command of the 4th Michigan Cavalry, with a numerical strength of 1489 men and 20 officers, with directions to move down the South Bank of the Amelgy River from 75 to 100 miles, to take possession of all the forries below Hawkinsville, push the river as far as the strength of my Regiment would permit and to scout the country on both sides of the river for the purpose of capturing Jeff Davis and party who were reported to have left Washington Sta. on the morning of the 1st inst. travelling south-westward with an intention of crossing the Amelgy at some point between Hawkinsville and Jacksonville, or to capture any other force of parties who might be fleeing from Richmond. I marched the command all night and until 8 A.M. of the 8th inst. having marched thirty- six miles when I halted five hours rested and put my command in motion again at One o'clock P.M. I marched fifteen miles farther and encamped for the night three miles below Hawkinsville, having marched a distance of 51 miles inside of 24 hours including all stops.

My Co. At 5 A.M. of the 9th inst moved my command out in the direction of Myville which place I reached at 3 o'clock P.M. and there
I discovered the first traces of the object of our
 Hunt. I learned that a train of ten or twelve wagons
 and ambulances had crossed the搬家 River
 at Brown Ferry, 1½ miles above Abilene, about 12
 o'clock on the previous night, but stopped at Abilene
 long enough to feed their animals and moved
 on again before daylight in the direction of Denver.
 I there met the 1st. Col. of the 1st. Mo. Cav. Reserves
 who informed me that he with a force of 40
 men was following in the track of the train. It
 had been ordered to cope with
 that supposed to be with the train. I decided not
to move on the same road with him. I continued
 my course three miles further down the river, where
 I learned additional facts regarding the character
 of the train, and which convinced me that it belonged
 to some of the parties for whom we were looking,
 and immediately determined to pursue by another
 road, believing that if they were hard pressed at
 any time they would pass from road to road to
 evade the efforts of their pursuers, and as they were
 reported as doing before crossing the river,
 Accordingly I ordered a detail of 125 men
 Officers (beside myself) of the best mounted in the com-
 mand, leaving the rest of the 2nd under command
 of Capt. Hathaway directing him to prevent the river
 from the Country, & in accordance with former
 orders. At four o'clock I put the column in
 motion, moving down the river road a distance
 of twelve miles to a point known as Wilcox's Hill,
 thence by a blind woods road through an almost
 unbroken waste of pine forest for a distance of
15 miles in a southwesterly direction to Leesville, which we reached about one o'clock on the morning of the 10th inst. Here passing my command as Confederate and inquiring for 'our train' representing that we were rear guard left to fight back the Yankee foe,' I learned from the inhabitants that a train and party meeting the description of the one reported to me at Leesville had recrossed the road the night before about 1½ miles out on the Leesville road. I at once turned the head of my column in that direction, expressing a desire for a guide. After moving to within one half mile of the camp I halted under cover of a slight eminence, dismounted 35 men and sent them under command of Lt. T. F. O'Neil to make the circuit of the camp and gain a position in its rear and thus cut off all possibility of escape, and with especial directions to steal the movement if possible without discovery, but if discovered and an alarm was raised I would immediately change the camp from the front when he was to operate with his command from my point which he might occupy. That if no alarm was raised I should consider that he had gained the position directed when he was to rest until I should commence the attack from the front. I had not decided at this time whether to move upon the camp at once or to wait until daylight, but upon further consideration decided to delay it until was now after two o'clock in the morning the moon was getting low and the deep shadows of the forest were falling heavily, rendering it easy for persons to escape undiscovered to the woods and swamps in the darkness. After waiting an hour or more
and just as the earliest dawn appeared, I put the column in motion and was enabled to approach within four or five rods of the camp undiscovers and in an instant the whole camp with its inmates was ours. A chain of mounted guards was immediately thrown around the camp and dismounted sentries placed at the tents and wagons. The surprise was so complete and the movement so sudden that none of the enemy were enabled to make the slightest defense, nor even arouse from their slumbers in time to grasp their weapons which were lying by their sides before they were wholly in our power. But at this moment a new scene opened destined to crown the otherwise perfect and glorious success of our expedition. For we had not held possession of the camp but a few minutes and not long enough to ascertain the extent of our capture, when sharp firing was commenced between the dismounted force under Lieut. Burton, and what was supposed at the time to be the rebel force guarding the train. The firing was about one hundred rods in rear of the camp and across a narrow ravine. I immediately ordered all my forces forward to the scene of the firing, leaving only sufficient to guard the camp and prisoners.

On arriving on the ground I found my men engaging a force of dismounted men who were concealed behind trees. I at once formed my men in line, dismounted them, threw out a line of skirmishers who were advancing handsomely when I became apprehensive that we were contending with some of our own men.
the determination displayed on their part and the peculiar report of their firearms. I ordered my men at once to cease firing and work out toward our opponents and hallow to them asking if the row and received the reply "Yankees."

The mistake was not discovered until it had cost the lives of two men killed, and a lieutenant severely wounded in the 4th N.C. and three men severely, and several slightly wounded in the 1st Wisconsin. This lamentable accident arose principally from the refusal of the boy in charge of the advance of the 1st Wisconsin to give a proper response to the challenge of Pvt. Dunkin, and partially from the over zeal of both parties each supposing their had met the enemy and it was yet daylight in the words that it was impossible to distinguish the uniforms of the men.

As soon as the firing had ceased I returned to camp and took an inventory of our capture when I ascertained that we had captured Pvt. Davis and family, a wife, 10 slaves, 8 children, Dr. Agness, his post master, Capt. H. Harrison, V. Luttrell, Capt. D. Davis, 1st Lt. Harrison, his private secretary, Capt. Card, Capt. Moody, Capt. Hatherway's 1st Howell Midshipman in the rebel Navy and 1st private soldier, besides Maj. Haggard Howell, 1st Lt. of the Davis 1st regiment, besides one white and one colored negro servant. We also captured five wagon, three ambulances about 15 horses and from 25 to 30 miles. The train was mostly loaded with commissary stores and private baggage of the Party.

Upon returning to camp I was accosted by Davis from among the prisoners.
who asked if I was the Officer in command, and upon my answering him that I was and asking him whom I was to call him, he replied that I might call him what or wherever I pleased. When I replied to him that I would call him Davis and after a moment's hesitation he said that was his name. When he suddenly drew himself up in true royal dignity and exclaimed, "I suppose that you consider it strange to charge a train of defenses with women and children but it is right--it is indispensable."

After allowing the prisoners time to prepare breakfast I mounted them on their own horses taking one of the ambulances for my wounded & one of the wagons for the dead, leaving the other two ambulances for the conveyance of the women and children, and started on my return by the direct route to Abbeville where I arrived at sundown of the same day. Here I halted for the night & called in the rest of my Regt from its duty along the river and resumed my march toward Macon at an early hour on the morning of the 11th, after having buried our dead and performed the last solemn rites of the Soldis to the fallen Comrades, sending swains in advance to announce the success of the expedition.

On the afternoon of the 11th and when several miles below Austellsville, we met the rest of our Brigade just coming out from Macon and received from them the first knowledge of the President's Proclamation accompanied by Genl. McLean's order offering a reward for the Capture of Davis. Receiving my independent command I continued my march to Macon where I arrived at 1 o'clock P.M. on
on the 13th inst. While yet on the march and 7 miles out of town I received orders by couriers to provide myself with a special detail of three officers, twenty men from my Regt and prepare to depart at once for Washington as special agent for Davis and Party, also to take 150 men to act as guard as far as Atlanta. I left Macon a special train at 7 o'clock in the morning of the 13th under the direction of Maj. Carr Wilson, having turned over all the private soldiers captured with Davis and Party excepting two, receiving an order of Clement Clay and wife. Arriving at Atlanta at daylight on the morning of the 14th, I found a train and guard in readiness to convey me and escort the point to Augusta where we arrived at Democrat of the same day, finding carriages and everything in readiness to convey us to the Steamer Undine, lying four miles below the city. We arrived on board at 8 o'clock where I received Lieut. H. Stephens and Maj. Earl Wheeler and Ruff and immediately sailed for Savannah where we arrived at 9 o'clock A.M. of the 15th. Reported to Genl. Burgo and at 11 o'clock A.M., the Steamer Strike was ordered alongside and the prisoners and guard were transferred on board. When the immediately steamed for Hilton Head, when opposite Ft. Jackson we met Steamer Civil with Genl. Elmory on board to whom I reported, and when he reached Savannah he telegraphed to Hilton Head for the Steamer Clyde to be got in readiness at once, to receive the prisoners and convey them to Washington. And upon our arrival we found all things in readiness and the transfer from the
On the 1st in the morning of the 12th we put to sea under convoy of the Steam Sloop of War Susanna. Arrived off Fortress Monroe at noon of the 17th inst. I immediately proceeded to shore and telegraphed my arrival to the Adjutant Colo. I, and I received orders to reply to anchor out. I await further orders.

At midnight of the same day, I received further orders from your honor to the same effect, saying that Colo. Hallack would be here at noon of the 20th, to arrange for the final disposal of the prisoners. I remained on ship board until the 23d inst., disposing mean while of all the prisoners except Davis, Clay, and Jameson in obedience to orders from Genl. Hallack and as per receipt in my possession. On the afternoon of that day the Susanna Davis and Clay were transferred under orders from the same source to the Casemates of Fortress Monroe and turned over to Col. Maj. Genl. Miles the 4th US Infantry acting as special agent, after which it was temporarily assigned quarters within the fort.

On the afternoon of the 23d I received orders from the War Department through Genl. Miles directing me to procure the disguise worn by Davis at the time of his capture and proceed to Washington and report to the Secretary of War. Accordingly I went over to the Steamer Clyde and received from Mr. Davis a ladies waterproof coat of which the Davis said was worn by Davis as a disguise at the time of his capture and which was identified by the men who saw it on him at the time. On the morning following the
Balance of the disguise was pursued which consisted of a shawl which was identified and admitted to be the one by Mrs. Davis. These articles I brought to Washington and turned them over to the Secretary of War. And this closes my account of the capture and custody up to the time of this being turned over to the United States authorities of the great Conspirator and traitor Jefferson Davis.

But I would not close this record without recording my silence of the high mark due to every officer and soldier in the command for their earnest zeal and unavailing perseverance through many sleepless nights and long weary marches many going entirely without food for 48 consecutive hours. And it is with great consolation that I can state that noble efforts were put forth either by individuals or by the Command for the capture of Davis, and not called for by the glitter of gold or incentive by prospective rewards but were actuated solely by patriotism and the highest sense of the soldier's duty: for no knowledge of the President's Proclamation or General Wilson's Order offering rewards for Davis was received until two days after the capture.

It is indeed hard to individualize where all have done their whole duty, but still I would make special mention of those assigned to important duties and who performed those duties well. Among these are Capt. Hathaway commanding part of the Right protecting the River, Capt. Thos. E. Hudson in command of advance guard of 144 picked men of who led
the column into the Camp, Lieuts. Ed. Saunders, and Henry S. Boutell, who were Com'd by fifty men each in Detachment, the latter of whom was severely wounded whilst gallantly leading his men, Lieut. A. B. Prouton, who had charge of dismounted men making the Circuit of the Enemy's Camp, Lieut. Dickinson and Davis for general duties as aids to Bennett Commanding Rear Guard. All of the above officers are entitled to the higher praise and in my judgment merit promotion.

I would also mention the names of Corporals, Hunger of 1st Co. Britten of 2d Co. together with Private Joe Ballard of 2d Co. Andrew Reu and Daniel Edwards of 2d Co. who were present at the killing of Davis besides several others whose names I did not obtain before leaving the regiment.

And in conclusion at the request of the Adjutant I named that I should state in my report to whom in my judgment the rewards offered by the Corps ought to be given, I would say that in view of all the facts I am convinced that to no one, individual does it justly belong for whilst one man might have been fortunate enough to have said half to Davis first it was while he was yet within the regular line of sentinels thrown around the Camp, and while some man was doing this (of which there are several claimants) this man performing equally important duties in guarding fighting do. And I feel that in no case should the rewards be granted to a less number than the 138 men of 2d Division who were actually present at the time of Davis Capture, and I am inclined to the opinion that it
should be distributed to the 4479 men and 200 officers comprising the expedition, and when I say this I believe I utter the wishes of a majority of the officers and men.

And for the guidance of the Department I recapitulate to the following chart, to wit:

Special detail present at capture:
1st Colonel
1st Captain
14 1st Lieutenants
2 2nd Lieutenants
128 Enlisted Men.

Picketing River, scouting country, &c.,
1st Captain
1st Lieutenant
5 2nd Lieutenants
291 Enlisted Men

Total Conscripted 20
Enlisted 4419

With these remarks the whole is respectfully submitted, and I have the honor to subscribe myself

Very Respectfully,
Your Ob't serv't

[Signature]

[Date and Location]