

A Kelley's Island soldier is captured as spy

BY LESLIE KORENKO

The enlistments of soldiers who volunteered at President Lincoln's first call were still in active service. Jacob Rush was one of the first men to enlist in November 1861. A friend indicated he enlisted in the Third Ohio Cavalry early in 1861, but his parents demanded his return because of his youth. He was just 16 when he enlisted, but claimed to be 18. A few months later, with his parents' consent, he entered the same regiment.



He participated in the pursuit of Zollicoffer through Kentucky, the battle of Pittsburgh Landing, siege of Corinth, the battles of Luka, Bardstown, Perryville, Stone River (near which he was wounded through the lung), among other engagements. He was injured and hospitalized for quite some time for the lung problem and was later wounded in the knee. Near the end of his enlistment, he was captured as a spy and detained as a prisoner of war.

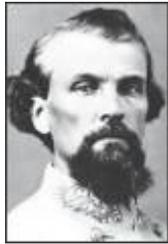
It is a thrilling story, and Rush shares it in his own words: If I should give you all the incidents that occurred from the time I was taken prisoner until I again breathed the air of freedom under our own flag, it would take more space than is allowed in this paper. I will therefore give only a few of the scenes, which took place while behind the curtain in the 'land of cotton'

On the 20th day of September 1864, those of our regiment who did not re-enlist were sent back to Nashville, Tenn., to be mustered out of the service, the time of enlistment having expired. We reached Columbia, Tenn., on the 30th of the same month, where we heard that the Rebel Gen. Forrest was within 10 miles of that place with a large cavalry force. The next day he came close to the town, driving in a small foraging train.

Columbia was poorly garrisoned, having only four guns and about 700 men, and the most of them without arms, as they had been turned over to the Government at Chattanooga. On the 1st of October, it became evident Forrest would undertake to capture the place. The telegraph wires had been cut during the night and Col. Pipes, the post commander, seeing that we were about to be hemmed in, wanted someone to go to Franklin to get a dispatch through to Nashville for reinforcement. The writer had been on duty here for about two months, having charge of the mail between Columbia and Nashville, and was well acquainted with the roads and knew a good many of the citizens. The Col. sent for me, I consented to go. It was thought best that I should not take a horse as in case of meeting Rebels I might take to the (woods) and stand a better chance getting through.

Leaving Columbia at 8 a.m. about half mile from town I overtook a stage going to Franklin. Taking passage in it I started on my way to Nashville. After about an hour drive we came in sight of Springhill, half way between Franklin and Columbia. At the same time we heard a yell and saw the Rebel Cavalry charging into town from the opposite side. Our horses were immediately turned about and put onto a full run towards Columbia. The writer was the only soldier in the stage, there were also two ladies and two elderly gentlemen all of them Rebels.

Opening the stage door I kept a sharp look out in the rear expecting to make for the woods as soon as we should see any of the Rebel soldiers coming in sight. All at once our horses stopped. I leaped from the stage to see what was the matter but only in time to find myself a prisoner and in less than five minutes our vehicle was on fire and the four blacks that had drawn us within a mile of Columbia again were saddled and underway and we were on our journey to be shown the scene behind the curtain.



I was at first accused of being a spy; then a commissioned officer. These suspicions arising from the fact of my having on a new suit of clothes preparatory to going home and from being captured in the way I was. They soon relieved me of my valuables, including my clothing, which was replaced by a butternut suit. I was then taken to Gen. Forrest (pictured here) with the letters and papers that were taken from me. He looked them over carefully, returning all with the exception of a letter and paper received a day before. These he said he would keep for information.

The paper contained an account of the capture of the steamers Island Queen and Philo Parsons. The letters spoke of the Fort Pillow massacre saying that if we ever met Gen. Forrest, our watchword should be Camp Pillow. He read this laughingly, seemed much amused and not at all offended. It did not seem possible that I was standing before the Monster of the Fort Pillow massacre. And let me here remark that during the whole of my soldier life, I never received any kinder treatment then from the hands of this same Gen. Forrest.

[In April 1864 the Union Garrison at Fort Pillow was comprised of 295 white Tennessee troops and 262 U. S. Colored Troops. Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest attacked the fort on April 12 with a cavalry division of about 2,500 men. The U. S. troops refused to surrender and were soon overwhelmed and driven to the River in deadly crossfire. Only 62 of the U. S. Colored Troops survived the fight. It was generally believed that the Confederates deliberately massacred the black soldiers. The Fort Pillow Massacre became a rallying cry for troops and reinforced their resolve to see the war through to its conclusion.]

I had with me a pocket album. Looking it over he came to my Father's picture turning to me he said, "Your Father is a Frenchman?" "No sir, a German" I replied. "You find our boys don't like the Dutch" Coming to a picture of a lady friend who did not bear a striking resemblance to me he said smilingly, "Your Sister I presume, the writer of this letter?" "Yes, Sir" I replied, of course.

All this time fighting was going on a quarter of a mile off. Our men were there guarding a trestle work being protected by stockades. Just then an orderly rode up saying, "They refuse to surrender" "Col. take the flag yourself. Say to them that if they do not surrender at once, but compel me to storm the stockade, I can show them no quarter" The Col. was met about five rods from the stockade by one man with a handkerchief in his hand who told the Col. that they would not recognize another flag of truce and that they asked no quarter. I will state here that all the other stockades had already surrendered.

Gen. Forrest, turning to me said "Who is holding that stockade?" "A Dutchman, a corporal with seven men" I replied. Gen. Forrest rode off a short distance, his staff and

escort following. Then giving some orders that I did not hear, in a short time six pieces of artillery were laying on the stockade every shot striking the works though without effect. This was kept up about half hour. By this time the Gen. had returned to where I was left, which was on a knoll about 40 rods from the stockade, every few minutes sending off an Orderly with orders. The firing all at once ceased and we saw 200-300 men advancing upon the stockade. One man, a few rods in advance of the rest, carried a Flag of Truce. As they came within 10 rods of the stockade, our boys opened fire, and the bearer of the flag with several others fell. Upon this the Rebels rushed forward with a yell and held their lines within a few rods of the stockade for several minutes, but were obliged to fall back. (Well, they did warn them that they would not recognize another flag of truce.)

These stockades were built in such a way that only one man can enter at a time. It is impossible to carry them by storm where the men have courage to hold out, as it is seldom that any of those in the stockade are injured. I guess this was the conclusion to which Gen. Forrest came before night as the Stars & Stripes were still floating from the top of the stockade on the end of a bayonet that was stuck out shortly after their desperate charge.

We marched all night and the next day and on the night of the 2nd of October we encamped on Gen. Pillow's farm at Summerset, Tenn. The next day at eight I got a mule to ride and in the afternoon of the same day Gen. Forrest, riding by the prisoners, called me by name and asked me to step out. Riding a short distance we came to his Head Quarters where his tent had been pitched awaiting him. Here we encamped for the night. He ordered me to dismount and sit down, saying "You had not had anything to eat since you were captured have you?" "No Sir, nothing but corn that some of your men gave us" I replied.

In a short time boiled ham and biscuits were passed to me. Gen. F. turning to me said, "Eat all you want as I shall not be able to issue any rations until after we cross the Tenn. River" He added smiling, 'We have to make haste and cross tomorrow or your folks will get there first and I may have to hurt some of them before they let me across' I than asked if I should go with the rest of the prisoners. 'No wait a while' he replied.

"Did you say the First Tenn. Regiment captured you?" "Yes Sir" Turning to one of the orderlies he said, "Has the First Tenn. come up yet?" "No, Sir, but it is the next regiment coming up" "Tell the Col. to draw up his regiment in front of my quarters" The regiment coming up he said to the Colonel, "Do you remember this young man?" "No Sir" "Did you not capture the stage on the Franklin pike?" "Yes Sir, I remember him now. I did not recognize him at first on account of his change of clothes"

"Yes. Do you know who got his clothes?" "No Sir" Calling me by name he said, "Go with me the length of this regiment and if you find the man that got your clothes, point him out to me" I did not find him and as I afterwards found out, the man that got them was captured the next day and our boys recognized the clothes as being mine. On the 4th we crossed the Tenn. River and on the 18th we arrived at Cahawba, Alabama where we were imprisoned until the close of the war. J. Rush.

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