

Chapter One : Captured (continued)

"I was about to give him my canteen when I discovered the rebels rapidly coming through the brush. I saw one of the oncoming skirmishers take a sudden interest in me. He jerked his musket from charge to direct aim. I was his mark.

"Perhaps some of you understand just what it is to look into a loaded gun, its trigger under the finger of a man who would just as soon pull as not. Naturally, I remained where I was. For several seconds I looked into the muzzle of that advancing musket. He came upon me swifter than my speech of him now.



Captured

With the bayonet at my breast the man yelled, "You — — of a — —, give me that sword."

"I was a prisoner and doomed to—I could not tell what."

Second Lt. Edward Tobie of the First Maine Cavalry was shocked to realize he'd stumbled into the hands of Rebels after a series of hard charges at Brandy Station, Virginia, in 1863. *"Never was the transition from the wildest excitement and the highest inflation of spirits to a feeling of thorough despondency and heartsickness more sudden and complete. A thousand thoughts crowded through my mind at once. Visions of Libby Prison, with attendant miseries, passed in mental review."*

Three Rebel cavalymen grabbed Capt. Emeric Szabad while he was on a scouting mission in October 1863. *"I had no choice but to give them my sword, the only weapon I had with me. In other words, I became prisoner, and that for the first time in my life, and a curious feeling it was!"* wrote Szabad.

This was his third war, as he had fought in the 1850s for Hungarian independence and then alongside Garibaldi in Italy. Well educated and multilingual, Szabad had written books analyzing the history of warfare. At the moment of capture, a Confederate snatched his beloved horse and silver spurs. *"I remonstrated with the man, but all in vain."* Led before a Confederate captain, *"I bitterly complained of the spoliation, but his only reply was 'that he could do nothing, and that I must put up with the laws of war.' It was no use telling him that I understood the laws of war differently."*

Lt. James Fales began his Libby Prison memoir with the bloody ambush of a column of Rebels on the night of June 17, 1863. Expecting an attack, he had dismounted his First Rhode Island Cavalry behind a stone wall that bordered a country lane. *"It was so dark that the enemy could not see us, and so they charged up in the road in column of fours, and the first notice they had of our location was the discharge of sixty carbines. The slaughter was fearful. Horses and men went down in wild confusion, while our men, drawing their six shooters, opened a deadly fire."*

Fales and his men became separated in the dark. When they reorganized and rode out the next morning, *"a charge in our rear forced the regiment to break over a wall and then, as my horse was jumping over the wall, my saddle slipped off over his tail and left me on the ground. I was summoned in the usual form, 'Surrender, you damned Yankee son of a bitch!'"*

Chapter One

“Under the circumstances, I was obliged to accept the invitation, and a red whiskered gentleman from South Carolina kindly took charge of my sabre and started me to the rear saying, ‘I believe your regiment is forming to charge; if there is any prospect of you being re-captured, I shall put a bullet through you.’ I made no answer, but thought it was pretty rough business.”

The officers sent to Libby Prison were often the best men the Union Army had. That’s because the officers most likely to be taken prisoner were the ones closest to the action. *“None are captured at the rear. It is generally in the front rank, struggling manfully, the soldier falls into the hands of the enemy.”*

These men were what we today would call type-A individuals: driven, aggressive, physically hardy, and almost fearless. They were the officers who led from the front, who showed initiative and courage, and were reluctant to retreat.

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