



The Capture of Jefferson Davis: The History of the Confederate President's Attempt to Escape the Union Army

Charles River Editors

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- *Includes accounts of Davis' escape and his correspondence with Southern generals
- *Includes accounts of Davis' capture and imprisonment
- *Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading
- *Includes a table of contents

On April 1, 1865, the Union army finally broke the Confederate army's siege lines around Petersburg at the Battle of Five Forks. When fighting across the siege lines erupted the next day, it forced Lee to make a disorderly retreat of both Petersburg and nearby Richmond. Left no choice with Lee's retreat, the Confederate government hurriedly evacuated Richmond, taking as many papers as they could, and Confederate president Jefferson Davis moved his headquarters to Danville, Virginia on April 3. On April 4, President Lincoln entered Richmond and famously toured the White House of the Confederacy, sitting at Davis's desk.

To most observers, the South was clearly reaching its end, but Davis had no intention of quitting the war. Even while he was fleeing, he attempted to order Confederate generals in the field to keep fighting. On April 9, 1865, Lee formally surrendered his weary army to Grant at Appomattox. Appomattox is frequently cited as the end of the Civil War, but there still remained several Confederate armies across the country, mostly under the command of General Joseph E. Johnston, the same commander who arrived with reinforcements by rail during the First Battle of Bull Run and gave the South hope with victory in the first major battle. But on April 26, 1865, Johnston defied Davis's orders and surrendered all of his forces to General Sherman. Over the next month, the remaining Confederate forces would surrender or quit.

The last skirmish between the two sides took place May 12-13, ending ironically with a Confederate victory at the Battle of Palmito Ranch in Texas. As fate would have it, the last fighting of the Civil War took place two days after Davis had been captured in Georgia, and his capture remained controversial for several decades. . Davis and his family had continued to flee south from Virginia trying to stay ahead of Union authorities, but with Lee and Johnston both surrendering, President Davis held a meeting of his Cabinet in Georgia in early May 1865, during which he officially dissolved the Confederate government.

Davis still hoped to escape federal authorities, but his luck ran out on May 10 in Irwinville, Georgia, when he and his family were spotted. While attempting to run, Davis slung his wife's overcoat over his shoulders. In the North, Davis was portrayed as attempting to disguise himself as a woman to avoid capture. Publications gladly ran cartoons depicting Davis in dresses and women's attire. Placed in heavy shackles, he was transported to Fort Monroe, Virginia where he was charged with treason and planning to assassinate Lincoln, with the country still reeling over his assassination by John Wilkes Booth. Davis was put in a basement cell with one small barred window facing the moat. A grand jury would later indict him for treason.

On December 25, 1868, treason charges were officially dropped against him, much to Davis' chagrin. Davis

actually relished the possibility of challenging the charges in court and was dismayed that he wasn't given a soapbox to make his arguments. Though Davis was offered several positions as an agent for various British interests, Presidents Grant, Hayes, Garfield and Arthur cut short any such arrangements, intent on not rewarding his "traitorous" actions. Still, Davis enjoyed his time in Europe, and in the decades after the war, he made several more trips to Europe.

The Capture of Jefferson Davis: The History of the Confederate President's Attempt to Escape the Union Army analyzes the history of one of the final chapters of the Civil War. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the flight and capture of Jefferson Davis like never before.

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