

CHAPTER VIII.

During the winter of 1863-4 Colonel Johnson originated a plan for capturing President Lincoln, which he suggested to General Hampton, who, after several conversations with Johnson upon the subject, gave it his approval, and entered heartily into the undertaking.

Confederate spies in Washington had kept General Lee thoroughly posted as to the disposition and force of every command of the enemy in and around his Capital. To carry out this daring enterprise, then, Colonel Johnson was to take the Maryland battalion, numbering two hundred and fifty sabres, and cross the Potomac above Georgetown, make a dash at a battalion of cavalry known to be stationed there, and push on to the Soldiers' Home, where it was well known President Lincoln lived, and after capturing him to send him across the river in charge of a body of picked men, whilst the main body was to cut the wires and roads between Washington and Baltimore, and then move back through Western Maryland to the Valley of Virginia ; or, if that means of retreat was cut off, Johnson was to go up into Pennsylvania, and on west to West Virginia beyond Grafton. It seemed, indeed, a most desperate undertaking, but everything promised its successful accomplishment. Indeed, so sanguine was Hampton that the plan of Johnson would succeed that he wanted to undertake it himself at the head of four thousand horse, and was only prevented by Sheridan's advance upon the Confederate Capital.

After the fight at Trevilians, then, he gave Johnson orders to prepare for his trip. The best horses in the cavalry command were selected, and the best men in the battalion picked out, but whilst shoeing his horses and recruiting his men he was prevented from carrying out his much-cherished plans by an order from General Early to join him at once with his battalion in the Valley of Virginia, and cover his rear whilst that General went after Hunter, who had marched upon Lynchburg.

In a week General Early returned to Staunton, and it was then that Colonel Johnson received his long-delayed commission as Brigadier-General of cavalry, and was at once assigned to the command of the brigade formerly commanded by General William E. Jones, who had been killed at the battle fought near New Hope.

Much to his gratification, he was given permission, on the third day of July, 1864, to attach the First Maryland to his brigade, and then ordered to take the advance of Early's army, moving on Martinsburg. At Leetown the brigade encountered Mulligan's advance, and after a severe engagement the enemy was