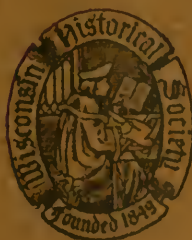


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# Brevet Major Isaac N. Earl: A Noted Scout of the Department of the Gulf

By Newton H. Culver

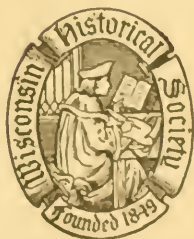


The State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
Separate No. 178  
From the Proceedings of the Society for 1916



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## Brevet Major Isaac N. Earl: A Noted Scout of the Department of the Gulf<sup>1</sup>

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By Newton H. Culver

The summer of 1861 we guarded the railroad from the Relay House nine miles out from Baltimore to Annapolis Junction. On November 4 we were taken to Baltimore and shipped on board the steamer Adelaide and were off for the east shore. Then we were taken up the Wicomico River to Whitehaven where we landed and began our first march. The first night we camped at Princess Anne and the second at Snowhill. Here we remained several days, and then proceeded on down the east shore. On one of our marches we met an old gentleman in a dilapi-

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Newton Earl was one of three orphan brothers who were reared by their uncles, Nathaniel, Edwin, Elisha, and William Crosby. William J. Earl and Isaac N. Earl lived with Elisha Crosby at Plainville, and Joseph W. Earl with Edwin Crosby near Pine Bluff, Adams County, Wis. William Crosby was at one time sheriff of Adams County. Living in the backwoods of a new country the boys had but meager school advantages. Their winters were spent in the lumber camps and their summers were passed driving and rafting logs on the Wisconsin River. Thus they grew up unendowed with the knowledge derived from books but were grounded in that of woodcraft. This knowledge later stood Isaac Earl in good stead as a scout.

All three of the brothers enlisted in the Federal army, and none survived the service. Joseph enlisted at Springville in Company D, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry, June 2, 1861, and died of disease at Ship Island, Miss., June 21, 1862. Isaac also enlisted in Company D, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry, on June 24, 1861, when about twenty years of age. The story of his military career and death will be told in the following pages. Most unfortunate of all the brothers was William. He enlisted at Belmont, Wis., in Company C, Seventh Wisconsin Infantry, Aug. 10, 1861, and on Nov. 28, following, was transferred to Battery



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dated vehicle. I saw one of the members of Company D take hold of one of the wheels and demand of the man that he "hurrah for Lincoln." After having been shaken several times he feebly responded. I afterward learned that the soldier who did the shaking was I. N. Earl.

During the ensuing eighteen months we returned to Baltimore, built the Wisconsin Barracks in Patterson's Park at the east end of East Baltimore Street, and went to Fortress Monroe, Newport News, and to Ship Island in the Gulf of Mexico. From the latter place we went to the Southwest Pass and then up the Mississippi to New Orleans, where with the Thirty-first Massachusetts Regiment, we were the first troops to enter after the city had surrendered to Commodore Farragut. Then followed the two expeditions to Vicksburg, the attempt to change the channel of the river by cutting a ditch across the bend opposite the city, and the return to Baton Rouge where a battle occurred August 5, 1862. We spent the ensuing winter at New Orleans and Baton Rouge. In the meantime the enemy fortified Port Hudson and General Banks began his series of operations against that place.

During these months Earl was promoted to the rank of corporal. He had become possessed of a breech-loading rifle and, gaining a place in advance of the line in the

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B, Fourth United States Artillery. On July 7, 1863 he deserted at Gettysburg; he was captured, taken to Camp Randall, and there shot while attempting to escape. He had always been a good soldier and fought bravely at Gettysburg. In view of his record and the absence of any known reason for his desertion it may be supposed that he was suffering at the time from some temporary lapse of reason.

In the narrative that follows I have depended upon my memoranda made day by day for the three years I served in Company C, Fourth Wisconsin Infantry (later Cavalry) and for the five months I was a member of Major Earl's corps of scouts. I left the scouts Oct. 27, 1864, just a month before Earl received his mortal wound. Information concerning this later period of his career may be obtained, by those who are interested, from the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*.

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charge of May 27, 1863, he dug a rifle pit in which he remained and made good use of his weapon. Col. Sidney A. Bean, our commander, observing this, made his way out to Earl two days later, got into the pit with Earl, and wanted to try the rifle. Becoming impatient for a Confederate to show his head above the breastworks, he raised his body above the pit when Earl pulled him down. He waited a little longer, then rose again, when Earl pulled him down a second time saying, "Colonel they will shoot you." A little later he rose quickly and was immediately shot, falling back dead into Earl's arms. Thus we lost a brave and true officer beloved by all his men and one whose prospects for the future were of the brightest.

While going over the enemy's works in the charge of June 14 Earl was slightly wounded and taken prisoner. He made good use of his faculties while inside the hostile lines. With other prisoners he was taken to the river bank to pick up driftwood for fuel. He picked up bit after bit of wood until he was some distance from his guard when he dropped his load and plunged into a bayou which separated him from some willows. Although fired at several times he gained their shelter and made his escape. Upon his return Earl was called before General Banks. He told the General the numbers of Confederate troops, the number and location of cannon mounted, the location of the magazines and quartermaster's stores, and the general situation inside the fortifications. In recognition of this service General Banks made him a lieutenant.

While on the march up Bayou Teche and down Red River the regiment mounted itself in three days' time by appropriating horses of various sizes and colors, and with all kinds of saddles and bridles. In this way the regiment became one of mounted infantry, and soon after by order



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of the War Department it was made a cavalry regiment. Since Wisconsin had raised but three regiments of cavalry up to that time our regiment did not change its number.

After the surrender of Port Hudson on July 8 the regiment returned to Baton Rouge and encamped on the State House grounds. Frequently all alone Lieutenant Earl busied himself scouring the surrounding country, familiarizing himself with the roads and streams, fords, bridges, and ferries. On September 29 he brought in as prisoners Captain Pinney and thirteen of his men from the east side of the Amite River. The night before he had passed over the stream, taking with him two negro boys who knew every person and all the roads for miles up and down that side of the river. They quietly surrounded house after house where they picked up one, two, or more men who, thinking they were safe, had come home to sleep.

Having seen Earl's captures and heard so much of his work as a scout, I had become desirous of going with him so as to judge of it for myself. I had thought it possible that his success was due more to luck than to fitness. On October 28, 1863 I joined him on a scouting expedition. We went out on the Benton Ferry road. There we saw five men quietly sitting on their horses on the opposite side of the river. Earl demanded their surrender; whereupon they rode away with us firing at them. There being no ferryboat on our side of the river Earl commanded "Right about, gallop, march," and we hastened up the river to where there was a ferryboat on our side. We crossed over in it but failed to intercept our men; we did, however, capture the son of Colonel Hunter, C. S. A. The quickness with which Earl decided what to do on several occasions while we were out convinced me that he had that qualification at least for a scout. That he knew

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just where he was all the time was evident. I was well pleased to be with him.

Some of us were out in the country round about Baton Rouge every day but without any apparent results. On November 25 scouting parties were out in all directions. What the occasion for it was I never knew. Whatever it was, however, one thing always happened. The plantation of Captain Pierce was visited where whisky and cigars were freely set out and drunkenness inevitably followed.

On the date mentioned Earl brought in eleven prisoners. Whether because of luck or something else in those days he obtained more information and captured more prisoners than all the other officers of the regiment combined, and this too without being obliged to visit Captain Pierce.

On December 6, 1863 Sergeant O'Connor, Henry Burton, Luther Struthers, and myself of Company C were with Earl. There were twenty-three of us in all in the party, a larger number than common. Starting at dark, we crossed the Amite River at Benton Ferry, took a southeast course for a mile or two, then began picking up a man or two at every house. They were members of the Ninth Louisiana Battalion and had been enlisted in that neighborhood. Among the fourteen men captured was their captain, whom Earl placed in charge of a couple of recruits. I had lost my hat in the darkness and had been in the Captain's house to get another. As I came out I noticed how familiarly the captain was talking with his guards, and that his horse was very uneasy. I whispered to one of his guards that he had better look out for I thought his prisoner was planning escape. I had not gone a rod when I heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs and the crack of a revolver. The captain was gone in the darkness.



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He had turned his horse in the right direction, given him the spur, and then let him go. Earl told me that in the future he would never allow a prisoner to ride his own horse even if he had to let him have the best horse in the command.

On the night of January 10, Lieutenant Earl with a picked lot of men passed out on the Port Hudson road. The next morning he ran into an ambush near Red Wood Bridge on the Clinton road. The report came into camp that they were all killed or captured. That evening two of Earl's men came in but they could not tell the fate of their comrades. The last they had seen of Earl he was running towards the woods, his horse having been shot when passing over an old field.

George L. Beardsley of Neillsville, Wisconsin, a member of Earl's party, has given me the following account of the fight and subsequent imprisonment. He and H. C. Stafford were in the advance. They captured one man, who made his escape during the night and no doubt informed his comrades of their location on the banks of the Amite River. In the morning they found they were being surrounded by superior numbers and passed over to the east side of the river. On coming to a bridge they found it guarded and thereupon hastened to a ford a half mile below, crossed over, and attempted to reach a ford on the Comite. They were met, however, by 200 men mounted on fresh horses commanded by Lieut. E. B. Golden. A fight of two hours followed when the little band of Federal soldiers surrendered. Lieutenant Golden proposed to hang them as horse thieves but Earl demanded for his men the rights of prisoners of war and Golden did not dare to carry out his threat. The enemy reported a loss of six killed and five wounded in the fight with Earl before his capture. The struggle was a hand-to-

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hand conflict with saber and revolver. None of Earl's men was killed or wounded, though several of their horses were killed.

The captured Federals were taken to Cahaba prison. On the way there Earl made his escape but was retaken by the aid of bloodhounds. At length on the night of April 28 Earl and Stafford reached the Union lines, having made their way out to Pensacola, Florida. They had escaped four times and had been retaken all but the last time by the use of bloodhounds. No wonder, in view of this experience, that Earl would stop in a chase at any time to shoot one of them.

On the evening of May 2, 1864 Lionel A. Sheldon, Colonel of the Forty-second Ohio Infantry, in command of his own regiment, the Eighteenth New York Battery, and the Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry marched out to Red Wood Bridge over Red Wood Creek on the Clinton road and bivouaced for the night. Here Lieutenant Earl was ordered to select twenty men to act as scouts the following day. Fyfe, Hamlin, Walsh, and myself were taken from Company C. The party was known as the "Awkward Squad." At early dawn we got under way, Hamlin flanking on the left and I on the right. We had hard work to keep abreast through the thick growth of timber, underbrush, and muscadine vines. About two miles were passed when we ran onto a cavalry picket, coming upon them so suddenly that the lieutenant in command and two of his men ran, leaving behind them their boots, arms, and two horses.

We followed them a couple of miles over an open field and into a growth of young pines when a section of artillery opened fire on us. We fell back over the brow of a hill and I was sent out to the right to see that we were not flanked. After sitting on my horse a few moments,

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peeking through the dead weeds that covered the brow of the hill and shielded me from view, I heard a body of infantry advancing from out the thick growth of young pines. They came out into the open field obliquely in front of me, the right wing only a few rods away. I sat quietly, wishing to see the whole line come out so as to be able to judge of their numbers. When at length the right flank came out of the pines so that I could see their numbers the left flank was not over a hundred feet from me. Up to this time the weeds had screened me but the moment my horse moved the Confederates saw me and, running to the brow of the hill, commenced firing at me while my horse bounded off at an angle to the right. Though over a hundred shots were fired at me neither my horse nor myself was hit. In our flight my horse leaped a fence and a gulch not less than eight feet deep and twelve feet wide.

About the time I got back to the "Awkward Squad" the violent barking of dogs was heard off to our left. Lieutenant Earl told me to see what it meant. On going out into the pine woods thirty or forty rods I ran onto a newly made trail of some 200 or more cavalry and returning informed Earl that about that number had passed to our rear. In the meantime the Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry had come up, Colonel Boardman in command. He ordered Captain Wooster of Company E and Lieutenant Knowles of Company G to go with Earl and his "Awkward Squad" and follow them up. We four of Company C in advance followed the trail single file through the woods. We had not gone far when by lying forward I could see under the limbs of the trees the legs of a gray horse returning on the trail. I had my revolver in my hand but seeing that we were discovered, when the rider was still too far for me to use it I put it up and took a shot with my carbine at

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the man's thighs, aiming low so as to be sure to hit him or his horse. The moment I fired my horse sprang forward and his horse reared up and fell backward, the man sliding off just as I got to his side. He handed me his revolver, belt, and gauntlet gloves but I told him to keep the gloves. His saber being strapped to his saddle had fallen under his horse. Just then Earl came up. When the prisoner looked up into the Lieutenant's face he turned pale and said, "For God's sake, Earl, don't kill me." Earl replied, "Lieutenant Golden, brave men treat prisoners like brothers." Shortly afterward I asked Earl what the Lieutenant meant. "When that man had me a prisoner a few months ago," he replied, "he took the boots from my feet and marched me barefoot a hundred miles or more."

The prisoner was put in charge of a member of Company E who led him beside his horse, holding him by the sleeve. This was all right as long as we continued the walk. We soon came to a clearing, one part of which was fenced off, and we had not advanced far when we saw the body of cavalry coming around the corner of the fenced field. They formed two lines facing us, either of which was as long as one we could make and but short rifle range away. We four in advance halted until the command came up. No order being given to form line, Lieutenant Earl said to Captain Wooster, the ranking officer, "Captain, what are you going to do?" He replied, "I do not know what is best." Some of the men then called out, "Let us form line and charge them." Lieutenant Knowles was asked if he thought it best to charge them. With an oath he answered in the negative. Still we sat there two abreast when Earl said, "They are preparing to charge us. Don't let them strike us in this form." The command was then given, "Left front into

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line," but still we sat inactive. More of the men called out, "Let us charge them," when finally the command was given "Twos left, gallop, march." Off toward the woods we went, the enemy after us. We who had been in advance were now in the rear. Word was passed along to form when we should reach the woods. The "Awkward Squad" stopped but not the two companies. We had only started for the woods when the man with the prisoner fell to the rear and the pursuing enemy called out "Surrender that man! Surrender that man!" A few of us put ourselves in the extreme rear and answered their demands with our revolvers. They kept up a rapid fusillade but fired over us not daring to aim low for fear of hitting their own man. They halted before they reached the woods and doubtless returned to their command by the way they came.

On our reaching our command it moved forward driving the enemy back across Olive Branch, by Olive Branch church, and soon fell back to a thick wood that bordered both sides of the Comite River. After a short stand here they crossed the stream, the wood screening their movements. In the meantime our cavalry resumed the advance. On entering the timber the road took a sharp turn to the right down stream. The Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry had just entered the woods, marching by fours, when Colonel Boardman halted them, remarking to his orderly, "I will go forward and see how the road runs." The orderly, George H. Hill of my company, remonstrated with him telling him the enemy must be close by, but it was of no avail. He went forward to where the bridge had been burned and rode down to the water's edge. The enemy, in line in the woods on the opposite side of the river, fired and he fell from his horse, pierced by several balls.



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At this juncture General Sheldon rode up and asked Lieutenant Earl if he knew of another ford. Earl replied that there was one about a half a mile below, and he was ordered to see if it was guarded. We hastened to a little-traveled road that crossed it and followed it through an open magnolia grove to the water's edge. On the opposite side was a field with an old rail fence overgrown with berry bushes and an opening only wide enough for the road to pass through. As Morris Fyfe and I were entering the stream with our horses a line of muskets was thrust through the fence in our faces. One shot pierced Fyfe's breast. We turned to retreat, while the "Awkward Squad" fell back out of range. I held Fyfe on his horse while we went back on a walk with the shots flying thick around us striking the trees on all sides. A musket ball was taken from Fyfe's back but not withstanding this he lived to farm in Iowa for many years. Upon Earl's reporting the lower ford guarded the command started on the return to Baton Rouge, the "Awkward Squad" again taking the advance. The Colt's naval revolver and officer's sword belt taken from Lieutenant Golden were given me to keep as trophies. My son, Lieut. H. W. Culver, still has them.

On the return of General Banks from his disastrous Red River campaign he authorized Earl to enlist a full company of men, preferably from his own regiment and those whose fitness he had tested for the service in question. Only part of the regiment had veteranized. From it he was to secure as many men as possible. He came to me at once and offered me the first lieutenancy in the company if I would join him. I had not been home, however, in the three years of my service and, besides, such exaggerated stories had been written home of what I had been doing that my people had gained the impres-



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sion that I was reckless. I therefore declined the offer.

General Banks was now relieved by Gen. E. R. S. Canby, who was given the command not only of the Department of the Gulf but also that of the West Mississippi which included Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas. He proceeded in an order of June 8, 1864 to authorize the organization of a corps of scouts, of which Earl was to be the commander. The men were to be subject to military discipline and were to receive from \$40 per month upward, depending upon the character of the services rendered by them. Later more detailed instructions were given Earl governing such things as the drawing of supplies, the confiscation of goods, and the rendering reports.

Over 100 men offered their services for the new service, only forty of whom were accepted by Earl. All but one were from the Fourth Wisconsin, some of whom having reënlisted were given furloughs to enable them to serve in the scouts. The one man chosen from outside the ranks of the Fourth Wisconsin was Pat Daugherty who lived out back of Baton Rouge and who on several occasions had served as a guide for Earl. All of the men had been selected by Earl on the basis of his prior acquaintance with them. He once told me he would rather have a small body of men whom he had tried and upon whom he could depend than a larger number whose qualifications he did not know. With a small number he could move more quickly and could capture small bodies of the enemy and get out of the way of larger forces more readily. Information furnished by his spies was acted upon by him with his body of uniformed men. Each of them when fully armed was a small walking arsenal carrying a Spencer carbine, two Remington revolvers, and a saber, and some of them a pocket revolver in addition.

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On June 13 we landed from the Sallie Robinson at Natchez. Dressed in citizens' clothes we passed around among the people and quietly reconnoitered our own picket lines which we found very open. For instance, a road that skirted along the river under the bluff below the city had not a picket on it. A regiment could have been marched into Natchez under the hill without being detected. Gullies that entered the city in between the roads were unguarded and could easily have been followed into the city. As a result of Earl's report General Canby quietly sent one of his officers to investigate conditions at Natchez. His report confirmed what Earl had said about the slackness of the pickets, and in a few days Earl received a note from General Canby congratulating him on the work he was doing.

Natchez stands on a peninsula. Above the city St. Catherine's Bayou approaches the Mississippi to within a half mile or so, then bears off to the east, then more directly to the south, and then to the west and enters the river below the city. Every road save one, the Summit Road, that enters the city crosses St. Catherine's Bayou. Dressed in citizens' clothes, with revolvers under our linen dusters and a map on tissue paper showing the stream and all the roads, Charles Baker and I began an inspection of the bridges and fords as well as the bypaths crossing the St. Catherine's. After the first day Baker left. I was three days at the work as many of the bridges were in bad condition. Some of the fords were unsafe because of quicksand, and the paths were many and some of them blind. Everything was shown on our tissue-paper maps. I need not say that we needed to be very careful for we often wanted to leave the city as secretly as possible and might have found it necessary to return

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in some haste. As yet we were without horses and four of our number were sent to Vicksburg to get a supply. When they arrived, there were none to be had and they were sent on to St. Louis. There they were detained some days. There were still further delays in getting arms and other equipment so that about six weeks passed before we had really begun our work. In the meantime those of us whose term of enlistment had expired went to New Orleans where we settled up with the government and received our discharge. On our return to Natchez we were at last ready for earnest work.

Late on the night of August 8 we passed out on the Palestine road on our first scout. We stopped in an old stable until early morning, when we were guided by a negro through the woods and fields to a large, deserted house, back of which was an old orchard. Here we found fifteen horses, some of them saddled and bridled showing that their former masters had just disappeared. I exchanged my horse for one that I thought much better. A few minutes later on riding him up to a near-by house a young lady told me that he belonged to a Lieutenant Dixon who was in command of the body of men which had just disappeared. My captured mount proved to be a discarded race horse, possessed of a habit of "bucking" which later brought me to grief.

About nine o'clock on the evening of August 13 we left the city by the Woodville road. When out about five miles we met an old gentleman in a carriage, and a few rods farther on six or eight Confederate cavalymen. We exchanged shots with them, two of our horses being hit with buckshot, when the enemy ran. We followed them a short distance and met two wagonloads of cotton, drawn by eight yoke of oxen, which we took back to town

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with us. The old gentleman, whose name was Johnson, said he had bought the cotton for Natchez parties, paying for it with Confederate money.

A report which had come to headquarters that the Confederates were crossing torpedoes at Tunica Bend was turned over to Lieutenant Earl to investigate. He sent out three men with orders to descend the river as far as Bayou Sara unless they should find enough to warrant reporting before reaching that point. He also dispatched a spy to the camp of Major Ravana, reported to be in charge of the Confederate submarine corps, to learn the location of the camp, its strength, and, if possible, the Major's intentions. The spy who did duty on this and on other occasions, was, I believe, Jennie O'Niel, a Mississippi girl whom Earl afterwards married. She is still living in Minneapolis, from which place I received a letter from her in April, 1916. Earl reported to General Canby that relying on sources in which he had the utmost confidence he did not think the whole force of Confederates from the Yazoo to Baton Rouge numbered over 1,500 men; and that the greater part of Gen. Wirt Adams' force as well as about 10,000 from Gen. Kirby Smith's command had been sent to join General Forrest who was on his way to Atlanta.

On August 29, 1864 it was reported that Shields, who lived in a large square brick house just outside our lines, had been receiving arms and ammunition and passing them over to our enemies. Four of our men were sent out to confiscate the arms provided any should be found. Shields refused either to deliver them or to let the men in to see for themselves, and barricaded himself in the center of his house where the two halls crossed. One of our men returned to report the situation and Earl and a number of men went out to the house. Earl repeated the demand for

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the surrender of the arms but still Shields refused. One of our number, Luther Struthers, then attempted to kick in one of the doors at which Earl, Charles Baker, and myself were stationed. I was watching Shields through a side light to the door and Baker was watching at the other side. He called to me to look out as Shields was going to shoot. I thought it a bluff and again placed my face against the glass when a bullet shattered it, grazing my left temple and filling my face with putty and bits of glass. Struthers then broke in the door and at the same time a shot, fired from one of the other doors, cut the old gentleman's suspenders where they cross on the back. Baker drew his revolver and just as he was about to shoot Shields surrendered. Seeing this I struck Baker's revolver and the shot went down through the floor. Captain Shields, a retired army officer, gave as an excuse for his resistance that a short time before another body of men had come and made the same demand as our own, and on being allowed to enter had not looked for arms but had taken a large quantity of silverware, some of which had been entrusted to him by his friends for safe-keeping. He had reported this affair to Adjutant General Thomas who had dined with him while on a tour of inspection down the river, and the General had advised him to defend himself if similar trouble occurred again. If Shields had possessed any arms or ammunition he had rid himself of them before we made our call. He belonged to that class of Confederates who secured exemption from surveillance by keeping open house for our officers.

Learning that a planter some twelve miles out on the Woodville road had four fine four-year-old colts that had never even been halterbroke, a roan mare, and three chestnut geldings, we went after them, and got them into a corral by the side of the road. While the others went in



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to capture them I sat on my horse, the one captured from Lieutenant Dixon, in order to head off any of them that might jump the fence. One did jump over and started down the road. I gave chase and soon came along side of him, when a lively race began. Not knowing that my horse had any tricks I leaned forward to give him all the help I could, when suddenly he stopped with back humped up and head down, while I pitched over his head carrying the reins and bit with me. I struck on my back and rolled over several times before I stopped. I was badly stunned, and received an injury to my spine from which I am still a sufferer. I had to be taken to Natchez in a cart, but three days later I was out again, and did not give up during the remainder of the time I remained with the corps.

On September 5, 1864 Lieutenant Earl was ordered to New Orleans. Being tired of remaining in quarters we prevailed upon Allen James to take us out for a little recreation. Crossing over from Washington through fields and woods on our way to the Pine Ridge road we came upon a body of ten cavalrymen in a lot in front of a house. Hotly pursued by us, they ran for the gate that opened into the lot by the house. A young lady ran down from the porch, grabbed the gate, and held it open for them despite our firing, and then slammed the gate shut against us. We got through, however, in time to capture one man, one mule, and four horses.

While we were out on this expedition Earl returned from New Orleans bringing the steamboat, *Ida May*. The boat was neither large nor fast. It had staterooms for sixty persons and quarters for an equal number of horses. Since we needed to frequent bayous a steamer of this size was well adapted to our service.

On September 12, 1864 we started at midnight on our first scout on the *Ida May*. Arriving at St. Joe, Louisiana,



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at ten o'clock the next morning, we hurriedly disembarked, and at once started out on the plank road. We had not gone far when we sighted fifteen cavalymen ahead of us, and immediately gave chase to them, but after a run of three miles, finding we were steadily losing ground, abandoned the pursuit. We continued following the plank road, however, and soon saw half a mile ahead of us a man wearing a linen duster following a buggy. We at once gave chase and overtook the party, which in addition to the man on foot, consisted of a negro driver and a good-looking woman about 30 years of age. In the back of the buggy there was a trunk. We took the party to a near-by house and searched all three, as well as the trunk. In the latter we found a memorandum containing information of great importance concerning the movements of the Confederate forces. It was this information which gave the first hint of "Pap Thomas" Price's intended raid into Missouri, thus enabling our army to be in readiness to meet him when he undertook the raid a short time afterward. The lady had in her trunk a flask of wine from which she and a few of the men drank to the sentiment proposed by her, that the war might soon cease and that the North and the South might ever live in peace. We learned later, after we had let her go, that she was a spy, possibly the noted Confederate spy, Belle Boyd.

On our return to the boat we found that the men left with her had captured two Confederates. With our captives we ran up to Vicksburg, and arrived there the next morning. We had not been there since July, 1862 and then had seen the place only from the opposite side of the river. We took this occasion, therefore, to inspect the city and the fortifications. Our steamer, too, was in need of some repairs, and while they were being made we were not idle. The day after our arrival, September 16, we

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crossed the river and proceeded to Richmond, or rather to where Richmond had been before General Grant's army had passed that way nearly a year and a half before. Now only blackened chimneys stood where the houses formerly had been, and rank weeds had taken the place of growing crops. All was desolation. On our way Billy Hine got off his horse and picked up a half-starved coon remarking, "Poor thing I will give you a lift to where there is something for you to eat. General Grant has so skinned the country that not even a coon can live in it."

We came at length to a large plantation, one on which the buildings had been left standing. Among them was a large sugar-house on which General Grant's signal corps had erected a lookout station. We stopped at this house to get our dinner but the woman of the house said she had nothing to give us. As we came along we had seen some cows in the pasture and chickens around the house. Some of the latter we killed and gave to the negro woman to dress and fry and told her to bake us some cornbread. Our dinner was soon on the table and a little search revealed a good supply of rich milk and plenty of butter.

When we had finished the meal Lieutenant Earl told me to make a search of the house for contraband goods. The woman of the house with her bunch of keys opened room after room until she had shown me all but one of the eleven rooms of the house. On coming to this one she declined to open it saying, "There is nothing in this room that you need to see." I told her that this was the room I must see. She replied, "I will not open it." I told her that then I would be under the necessity of opening it myself. Without further words she opened it. It was a room about sixteen feet square. On three sides extending from the floor to the ceiling were wide shelves filled with United States medical stores. As I came out of the room

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the woman remarked that probably I would like to know by what authority she had these goods in her possession. I replied that I certainly would. She then presented an itemized bill of them and a permit to take them outside our lines, signed by a prominent-major general of the United States then commanding that district. I called Lieutenant Earl to inspect the room with its contents and to examine the bill and permit. After looking them over he asked if I had searched the outside premises. I replied that I had not. "Do so," he replied. The house was a large, one-story structure elevated six or seven feet from the ground on piles as a protection from floods caused by the breaking of the levees. I found it tightly boarded, however, down to the ground, and not an opening in it on any side. There was one place, however, where nails had been driven recently. With an ax I pried the boards off and made an opening which revealed the whole basement filled with barrels of pork and beef standing on end two barrels deep. For these, also, the woman showed an itemized bill and permit from the same major-general.

We had no means of transportation, and were unable even to take the medical stores. Nothing could be done but report the find to General Canby, which I am quite sure was done, though I find no record of it in the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. After the search of the premises we went east to the river, reaching it at New Carthage. From this place we followed up the left bank of the river to a point opposite Vicksburg. On our way we made a dash on a house in which we were told there were two guerillas, Winslow and Brownlow by name. They escaped, but were compelled to leave horses and arms in our hands.

Our boat being repaired we ran down the river on the evening of September 18 and landed five miles above St.

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Joe. From here we made a dash down through the village, and out on the plank road to a Mr. Powell's where we captured three men. Powell was taken prisoner, for we learned he engaged in receiving Confederate mail and sending it across the river when opportunity offered. At his house we found a large mail on its way east. Six miles farther on we captured another man with three horses. Four men were now sent back to St. Joe with the prisoners, mail, and captured horses, the *Ida May* having followed us down to this place. At this point eleven miles out we left the plank road and skirted along the back of the plantations on the north side of the road. Earl had learned that a body of twenty-five men were camped in this vicinity on their way in to be ferried across the river at St. Joe. In the gray of the morning we saw a camp fire in front of a house on the opposite side of the road. A small gate opened from the road into the yard where the men were preparing their breakfasts. I signaled Lieutenant Earl and Fenlason and I made a dash through the gate and between the men and the porch, on which we saw a stack of guns. They were taken entirely by surprise and all surrendered before any of our men entered the yard. One man started to run but a shot through the crown of his hat brought him back. They were mechanics on their way east and had only the one stack of arms.

It had been raining and we saw that a wagon train had passed by and was between us and the river. We destroyed the few arms found and with sabers strapped to our saddles started to follow them. We had not gone more than a mile when we heard the darky drivers and the "chuck" of the wagons. After signaling Earl we put spurs to our horses and turning a bend in the road came upon a cavalryman riding unconcernedly behind the rear wagon. On turning his head he found himself looking into the muzzle

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of a revolver. Upon being ordered to throw down his arms, he immediately complied. One after another five more men were treated in the same way. The results of our morning's work were: thirty-five men, nine horses, thirty-six mules and harnesses, six wagons, about nine tons of wool, and a valuable mail. After arriving at St. Joe we captured a four-wheeled truck on which was loaded a ferryboat and a skiff. They had backed the truck and its load into the brush, and we found and burned them. The wool was on its way from Texas to Georgia to be manufactured into uniforms for the Confederate soldiers.

On September 24 we ran down to Port Hudson, where we left the *Ida May* to meet us at Baton Rouge. On our way down we captured one man and five horses. The next day we visited our regiment at Baton Rouge and found the *Ida May* waiting for us. While at Baton Rouge we drew twenty Sharps carbines, twenty revolvers, twenty sabers, and twenty saddles. For the first time our corps was fully equipped. As for horses we had more than supplied ourselves from those captured from the enemy. On our return trip to Natchez we had fine practice in the use of our new arms, the many alligators sunning themselves along the banks of the river affording us fine targets.

On the morning of September 28 we landed at Hard Times on the opposite side of the river from Grand Gulf. Proceeding inland ten or twelve miles we captured a wagon-load of clothing on its way into the Confederacy. Then we returned to our boat and ran up to Point Pleasant, four miles from Douglass' Landing, from which Earl learned the goods had been taken, and where Douglass lived. We found his house strongly barricaded with bales of cotton, and himself well supplied with arms. Since



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it was known that he had a supply of goods constantly on hand he was often attacked by robbers. Only the day before, five of them had made a raid on him, and three of their number still lay dead in his yard. At his house we found 1,500 yards of cloth, much of it of very fine quality, and much other contraband goods. The next morning we took Douglass and his family with all the goods with us. When we got to Buckner's Landing, where we met the Ida May we found that the men left with the boat had captured a small steamer, belonging to Douglass, called the Buffalo. With it he was doing a fine business. He had itemized bills and permits for all these goods from the commander at Vicksburg. No wonder large industries were built up in the years that followed the war by some of our officers who thought more of gaining dollars than of gaining victories over our enemies.

Our secret service was not confined strictly to military affairs. Since coming to Natchez Earl had kept detectives busy. One line of investigation led to the location near Fort Adams of 607 bales of cotton which were piled up on the bank of the river and secreted by scrub oaks. When the time was ripe an Illinois regiment was sent with a steamer to bring the cotton to Natchez. This capture alone was worth over \$300,000.

On the morning of September 30 we joined the command of Colonel Osband, a brigade of cavalry, one regiment of which was colored. Marching rapidly out to Port Gibson, we fed our horses and took dinner. Our scouts were stationed around a yard in which was a very good house. While our horses were eating, two young ladies came out of the house and began to converse with us. They asked us if we knew "General Earl" and his men. We replied that we had frequently met them and sometimes had been associated with them. They then



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expressed a great desire to see "General Earl." Lieutenant Earl being only a few steps away was called and given an introduction to them. They could hardly believe that we were telling the truth. One of the ladies was the daughter of General Van Dorn and the other, the sister of Colonel Jenkins, Gen. Joe Wheeler's adjutant-general.

We camped a mile east of Port Gibson with Colonel Osband's command and breakfasted at a Mr. Colman's, a prominent Port Gibson lawyer. We then marched out on the Fayette road, turned again, and went to Rodney. There we found a steamer with a regiment of colored infantry, and our own steamer was at the dock. A good Union family entertained us for both supper and breakfast, and upon leaving we paid them well for their hospitality.

For some reason when we started out on October 2, we did not take the advance. At the entrance of a long, covered bridge the advance guard was fired on and fell back and we took their place. In the meantime the enemy disappeared. Before reaching Fayette our scouts had gathered up a dozen horses, for one of which I exchanged my own. On nearing the village and looking down its main street we saw about fifty horses, fully equipped, tied along the sides of the street, while their riders were just coming out of church. I signaled Earl, who motioned us forward. Without further urging Fenslason and I charged them, while Earl followed with the corps. Not having time to mount before we were among them they dodged behind buildings and commenced firing.

Turning into the street from the left a man, dressed in gray, in an open carriage drawn by two horses dashed furiously out of the village. Fenslason and I, being in advance of the others, gave chase. We knew there was a body of cavalry encamped out that way and thinking

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it probable the fugitive was in command of it we wanted to capture him. Seeing us coming, the vidette fired and ran. After passing the vidette's post we overtook the man in the buggy and turning him around hurried him back. When we came near the village we slackened our pace and searched the two valises he had. In one of them we found his linen on one side, and rolls of greenbacks on the other, while the other valise was entirely filled with greenbacks. The man was a Confederate cotton agent, and was prepared to pay for the 607 bales of cotton spoken of above. We handed him over to Lieutenant Earl who delivered him to Colonel Osband's provost marshal.

A number of men and horses were captured by Earl before Colonel Osband and his command came up. It is necessary to say here that the men of our corps took commands from no one but Lieutenant Earl, and he received his orders from General Canby only. Not being satisfied with the conduct of Colonel Osband, who had partaken too freely of rum, Earl left him at Fayette and returned to Natchez. We reached our quarters at ten o'clock in the evening. Colonel Osband came in with his command the next forenoon, having had quite a skirmish with the body of soldiers, encamped outside of Fayette, which the captured cotton agent had sought to join.

On the morning of October 5 we went to Kingston. We made a dash through the village but found no enemy there. Proceeding on, we searched the house of a Mr. Farrer. On coming out of the house into the road we came up behind three men to whom we gave chase. They entered a wood close by, leaving their horses and a double-barreled shotgun. Colonel Powers of the Confederate army was in the vicinity. Small bodies of his men often showed themselves but as often got out of the way. At

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the house of a Mr. Bowers we found a quantity of contraband goods, consisting of leather and cloth, which Lieutenant Earl ordered to be taken out and burned. While we were there a squad of Confederate cavalry put in an appearance and as quickly disappeared. I was a good deal troubled through the day over what seemed to me to be recklessness on the part of Lieutenant Earl; on one occasion I said as much to him, but he only laughed at me. We did not stop anywhere to get dinner but kept on the alert all day. Just before dark we returned a couple of miles towards Natchez and stopped at a house for supper. While our meal was being prepared our picket reported the approach of the enemy. We mounted and rode on toward Natchez for some distance when we turned into another house where we had supper. While eating Lieutenant Earl said: "Boys I am disappointed in you. None of you knew the situation today any better than Culver, yet no one but he showed any concern. Had the situation been as it seemed, we were in a most critical condition. Other forces of ours were out and we were to draw the enemy on or attract their attention while our forces should get in their rear. They did not bite at the bait."

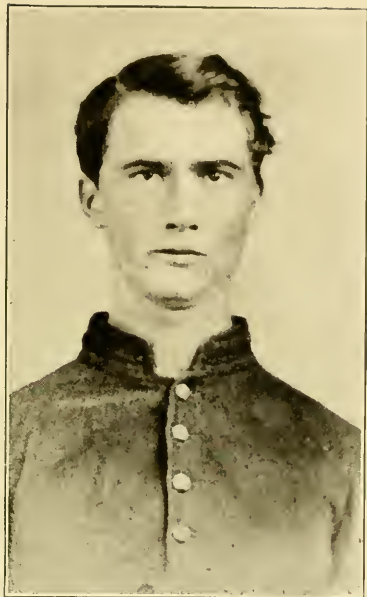
On the evening of October 6 we again went on board our boat. In the morning we landed at Waterproof, and rode rapidly out into the country a few miles, where we had heard some Confederates were encamped. Not finding them, we returned to our boat and ran up to the plantation of Gustavus Bass. We knew him to be a spy on our movements, using the cupola of his house for a lookout and when our steamer was in sight, giving warning to any Confederates that might be approaching the river to be ferried across. Learning that he had some horses hid out in the woods in charge of some negroes, Lieutenant Earl had a chicken coop set on fire, thinking the negroes

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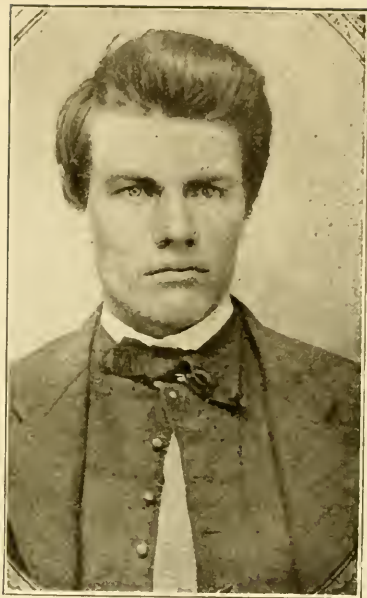
would suppose one of their cabins was burning and so would come out of the woods. The maneuver had the desired effect and the horses were brought out. We picketed the levee road for a distance of six miles up and down the river, hoping to intercept a body of the enemy which we knew to be in that vicinity. Not meeting any, however, we boarded the *Ida May* and ran down the river several miles. Towards morning with all lights out, we ran back up the river to a point opposite Bruinsburg, Mississippi. Here we landed before daylight and rode rapidly down to St. Joe and out on the plank road.

As usual, Charles W. Fenlason was my companion on the advance. He was cautious and brave, quick to see, and ready to act. About eight miles out of town on emerging from a wood into an open field, we saw coming our way but a few rods in advance a very tall man on a short-legged, black pony. The man was apparently not looking for trouble. He seemed to awake suddenly and started off to our left as fast as his pony could carry him. I gave chase, while Fenlason, seeing the top of an ambulance coming over a rise of ground in the road ahead, started for it, closely followed by the scouts. My man ran to a fence, jumped from his pony, and sprang for it. Just as he was stretched out full length on top of the fence I fired at him with my revolver. Landing on his feet on the other side, his hands on his stomach, he cried out, "For God's sake don't shoot again!" As I rode up to the fence he said, "You have shot me through the bowels." I saw that the top rail was hit and knew that both rail and bowels could not be hit by the same ball. "You are not hurt," I said, "Only a sliver has hit you." He looked at the rail, then at his stomach, and said, "I thank God. I was sure I had got my last." He then said, "Where did you come from? You went down the river last night."

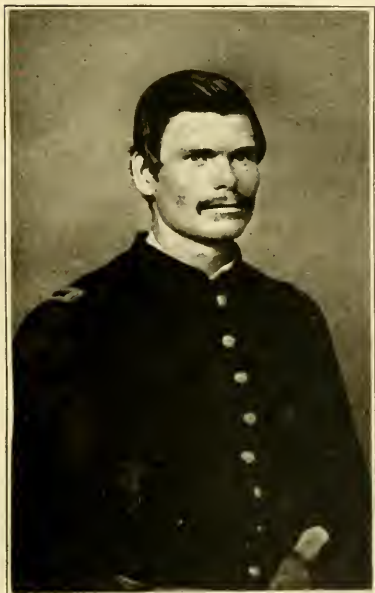




NEWTON H. CULVER



CHARLES W. FENLASON



ISAAC N. EARL



CHARLES BAKER





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I asked him who he thought we were. "Don't you suppose I know who you are?" he answered, "You are Earl's scouts."

When I got back to the road with him, I found that Earl had captured two majors, one captain, two enlisted men, and the ambulance, which contained about six bushels of mail and over a million dollars of Confederate money, besides all the flags captured from General Banks up Red River and all that had been captured from us in western Louisiana since our taking of New Orleans.

Having information that a larger Confederate force was but a short distance away, Earl ordered a retreat to the boat. On our arrival at Natchez, Lieutenant Earl, Serg. Edward Harris, myself, and six of the men for guards started for New Orleans with our prisoners.

On Sunday, October 9, we stopped at Baton Rouge, where our regiment was encamped, in order to visit our comrades. Lieutenant Earl and Sergeant Harris with four of the men went first, leaving me with the other two to guard our prisoners. They had not been gone long when Major General Herron's superintendent of transportation came aboard and asked the captain of the boat who was in charge. Upon being referred to me, he said that he wanted to take the boat to ferry a regiment across the river from West Baton Rouge. I told him that Lieutenant Earl was up town and that I was not at liberty to let the boat be moved without his order. The major replied with some heat that it was the order of General Herron who was a bigger man than Earl. I replied that I was sorry to deny General Herron's authority, and observed that if he saw fit I supposed he could place me under arrest when my authority would end, and he could then do as he liked. He concluded, however, to wait for Lieutenant Earl's return. After an hour or so

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Earl returned and I gave him an introduction to the major, who told him of my refusal to allow the boat to be moved. Earl told him I had done right but that if he would furnish what guards I wanted he could have the use of the boat. Then turning to me he said: "Place guards to keep all, including officers, on the lower deck." The guards were accordingly furnished and placed. The regiment was ferried across the river, the major accompanying us in the best of humor. We then proceeded on our way, reaching New Orleans at ten o'clock the next day. After taking our captives to prison we took the flags to General Canby's office. Here Lieutenant Earl put the Brashier City Garrison flag into my hands saying, "It is your due to hand this flag to General Canby."

The *Ida May* was pronounced in need of repairs. We were not able to get another steamer at once and so continued to keep our quarters on the *Ida May* for two weeks when the *Starlight* was assigned to us, and we started on our return. We stopped at Baton Rouge on the way, where I last met the comrades of the Fourth Wisconsin. On October 26 we arrived at Natchez, and the next day Lieutenant Earl gave me my discharge. I was under contract to serve four months, and had served three weeks longer than this. Earl tried to persuade me to remain, urging among other things, that if I did not he would take the advance himself. This he did and received the fatal shot a month and two days later while entering Fayette, Mississippi, at night with the advance of the corps.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The most connected account I have of the death of Earl is contained in a letter written to me from Natchez, Dec. 1, 1864, by Charles Baker. It states, in substance that Earl with the scouts and about fifteen Mississippi cavalrymen embarked on the *Colonel Cowles* on November 29. After ascending the river some fifteen miles the party landed and set out for Fayette, which was reached some time after dark. The men passed quietly through the town, not intending

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I will now give from my memoranda the names of the members of the corps:

### Noncommissioned Officers

Allen James, 1st Sergeant  
L. E. Hatch, Commission Sergeant  
E. A. Harris, 2nd Sergeant  
Byron Kenyon, 3rd Sergeant  
N. H. Culver, 1st Corporal  
C. W. Fenlason, 2nd Corporal  
Milan Grayham, 3rd Corporal

### Privates

Charles Baker, Company I, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
L. B. Bennett, Company I, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
Spencer Bills, Company H, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
Pat Daugherty, a citizen of Louisiana

to stop. Upon approaching the hotel, however, two or three shots rang out. Major Earl was evidently the target for one shot took effect in the jaw, one in the breast, and a third in the right wrist. He was taken to the house of Dr. Duncan, who advised that it would be fatal to attempt his removal to Natchez. Major Earl advised his men to leave him, which was done, and Natchez was reached at daylight, November 30. A flag of truce was sent out, accompanied by two surgeons and Earl's wife, arriving at Fayette in the forenoon of December 1. They were not allowed to see Earl, but were assured by the doctor attending him that he was being well cared for and his wounds were not necessarily mortal. Later information proved that he was already dead.

Lieutenant Paddock, an old acquaintance of Earl in Wisconsin, was in command of the Confederate scouts, and it was by one of his men that the fatal shots were fired. He promised to inform the authorities at Natchez of any serious change in Earl's condition. They were never notified of his death, and it has been believed generally by his associates that he was foully dealt with by his captors.

Four years ago, however, as the result of an advertisement which I placed in a Natchez paper, I received several letters from Thomas G. Dicks, an ex-Confederate scout. When Earl's command entered Fayette, he stated, he was sitting in front of the hotel beside Serg. James Smith. Smith ordered the lights extinguished, and when the Federal advance came within forty yards he fired one shot from a double-barreled gun loaded with one ball and nine buckshot. Dicks indignantly resented the charge that Earl was poisoned or ill treated in any way. He stated further that Earl was buried at Red Lick church, and that after the war Mrs. Earl came for the body and removed it to her home in Minneapolis.

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George Hays, Company G, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
William S. Hine, Company I, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
William Kent, Company G, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
Samuel Jewell, Company G, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
Hiram Netherfield, a citizen of Missouri  
Nelson Porter, Company G, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
Samuel Porter, a citizen of Missouri  
— McLachlin, a citizen of Mississippi  
Jacob Ripley, Company F, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
Archibald Rowan, Company I, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
Andrew Ryan, Company G, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
Luther Struthers, Company C, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
— Simpson, Second Wisconsin Cavalry  
Nicholas Wait, Company K, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry  
Frank Wallace, Second Wisconsin Cavalry  
Nathaniel J. White, Fourth Wisconsin Cavalry

The original plan was to form three sections of which Henry C. Stafford was to have commanded the Second and P. Daugherty the Third. They were never formed and both Stafford and Daugherty acted as privates.





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