



Thomas D. Cockrell, Michael B. Ballard, eds. *Chickasaw, a Mississippi Scout for the Union: The Civil War Memoir of Levi H. Naron, As Recounted by R. W. Surby*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005. xvi + 181 pp. \$19.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-3101-5.

Reviewed by Joseph Fitzharris (Department of History, University of St. Thomas, Minnesota)

Published on H-CivWar (November, 2006)

## A Union Scout in Civil War Mississippi

Levi “Chickasaw” Naron’s reminiscences provide us with views of the inner workings of Union scouting operations, and of the relationships between Unionists and Confederates in the Mississippi and Tennessee home fronts. In addition, Naron’s story is of some inherent interest. Thomas D. Cockrell and Michael B. Ballard have rescued this story from oblivion. In the process, however, some of their annotations missed the mark.

A small Mississippi planter when his state seceded, Naron was a staunch Union man. Unlike many who bent to prevailing political winds by remaining quiet and staying put, Naron spoke out. Not long after completing the harvest of 1861, he was visited by a “vigilance committee” that clearly had hanging on its collective mind. In early December, he left family, friends, and home, to journey north to enter service with the Union forces. His wife and children remained behind, believing him “governed by the right principles” of Unionism.

After several delays and imprisonment, Naron escaped from the Provost Marshal in Corinth and made his way into Union lines near Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee. He was captured by a Union picket and taken before the Regiment’s Colonel. Within hours, General William T. Sherman entered the camp. Sherman questioned Naron about what he had seen of the Confederate forces as he moved through the countryside. Recognizing Naron as a good observer, Sherman sent him to scout towards Corinth. Upon his return, Naron reported that the Confederate main force was poised to attack the Union forces from the south at Shiloh Church and Pittsburg Landing (p. 31). He modestly reported that, in the subsequent battle of Shiloh, he “acquitted [him]self with honor and credit” (pp. 31-32).

After the Confederate evacuation of Corinth, Naron began working for Gen. John Pope, who sent him south on several scouts. On one, he went home to visit his wife. Neighbors heard of his return, and planned to hunt him

down with dogs, but during the night, he fled for Columbus, Mississippi. There he fell in with an officer charged with recruiting slaves for use in building the defensive works, who gave him a tour of those works. Leaving Columbus, he met a rebel Colonel who was going home across Union lines. The Colonel’s wife had gathered several recruits for his regiment. Later, Union forces led by Naron captured the Colonel. Learning his true name and hometown, the Colonel took revenge after his exchange by having all of Naron’s property seized.

When Pope went east to Virginia, Naron began working for General William S. Rosecrans, and for the first time, “Chickasaw” was sworn into federal service. During the summer of 1862, he operated in the Corinth area as chief of Rosecrans’s scouts. On one of his many trips across the lines, Naron entered Confederate Iuka, where he learned of plans to attack Corinth. Arrested, he escaped imprisonment to bring word to his general. With Noran’s report, Union forces had three days to prepare for the attack by Generals Sterling Price and Earl Van Dorn.

When Rosecrans took command of the Army of the Tennessee/Cumberland, he wanted Naron to come with him, but Chickasaw began working for Gen. Andrew Hamilton. Not long after this, one of his spies returned with word that his family had fled after their properties were seized. Later, he learned his wife and children were in St. Louis, where he visited them in March of 1863. Four days after his arrival, his wife died of illnesses contracted in the hard living of her flight north. He left his six children with his widowed nineteen year-old sister (p. 99).

Returning to Memphis, he found that both General Rosecrans and General Grenville Dodge wanted him as chief of their scouts. Reporting to Dodge at Corinth, he reorganized the scouts and led them in a series of operations, some of which are given extensive treatment in

this reminiscence. A young woman brought him meals while he was in the field, and he offered his assistance if she came to Corinth. In November of 1863, she crossed Union lines into Corinth and as Naron put it, "I knew of no better way to remunerate her than to offer her my heart and hand, which she at once accepted" (p. 106).

In December of 1863, after a recent wound, he took leave to visit his family. Stopping in Nashville, he found one of his missing scouts in a military hospital. The man's report of his experiences answered questions about the fate of another scout as well. Reaching his new home in Illinois in January, he remained there until October of 1864, when he returned south again. Since General Dodge was now in St. Louis, he served General Cadwalader C. Washburn and participated in General Benjamin Grierson's raid along the Mobile and Ohio Rail Road in Mississippi between December 1864 and January 1865. Upon his return to Memphis, he went home to his family, and his war story ends.

Like many other stories told after the fact—though this was done in 1865 and was nearly contemporaneous, dates are missing and some events seem poorly anchored in time. For example, we are sure he started in December of 1861 and we know he got into Union lines just a few days before the Battle of Shiloh (April 6-7, 1862) (pp. 24-32), but the in-between happenings are just in between. Again, on page 127 Colonel Morgan's men are indistinctly located in either July or November of 1863. While these are not crucial, they are typical of the genre, and in the later instance, only the July crossing into Ohio is noted editorially.

The editors tried hard to identify the people mentioned and to explain terms. For example, Naron's new wife is identified as Mary Hannah Lee of Alabama, born 1836. The editors attempt to identify Confederate Major Blye—as Green L. Blythe, commanding irregular forces in northern Mississippi (p. 90 n. 95)—and Union General James Veatch, whose name he spelled "Veitch." The editors say, "Buckshot and balls were .69 caliber ammunition that included a combination of buckshot and larger musket balls and were used in smoothbore small arms" (p. 14 n. 17). This is not entirely correct. Stephen E. Osman offers a more succinct description. "The buck and ball cartridge was a 64 caliber ball and 3 buckshot used in smoothbore muskets for close range firing."<sup>[1]</sup> A few comments are true but need some expansion to make them useful, such as: "Guerrilla and partisan activities were a major problem for Union occupation forces in North Mississippi and West Tennessee for most of the war" (p. 110 n. 108).

Some editorial comments are either wrong or incomplete. When Naron reports learning that rebels planned

"to steal the horses of Company A, Thirty-Sixth Illinois Cavalry," the editors write: "Naron is likely referring to an Illinois cavalry company which was part of the Thirty-Sixth Illinois Infantry regiment. There was no Thirty-Sixth Illinois Cavalry regiment" (p.97 n. 99). In this, they are not correct. In the *Official Records*, Company "B" of the 36th Illinois Cavalry served as the escort to the commander of the 1st Division, Right Wing, Army of the Cumberland in January of 1863, and Company "A" was reported as part of the cavalry brigade 4th division, XIII Army Corps on August 31, 1863.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the Records of Events for the 36th Illinois Infantry, there is no mention of a cavalry company attached to the regiment. Its company "A" was on detached service in Mississippi in October-December 1862 as escort to General Hamilton, having served General Rosecrans as escorts earlier. They could well have been mounted, but there is no mention of them getting horses or mules. <sup>[3]</sup>

Naron refers to Lookout Mountain (outside Chattanooga) as being taken by General Sherman's forces, whereas the editors say "actually, troops led by Joseph Hooker captured Lookout Mountain during Grant's successful campaign" (p. 125 n. 116). James McPherson, on the other hand, in *Battle Cry of Freedom*, which serves as a source for the editors' annotations, clearly indicates that General George H. Thomas's Corps took the mountain.<sup>[4]</sup>

Levi Naron's reminiscence itself has value and most of the editorial comments are useful. The few editorial flaws and quirks do not offset the book's value. Historians working on Union operations in northern Mississippi and western Tennessee, and on Union army scouts will find this of use. Civil War buffs will probably form most of the audience for the book.

#### Notes

[1]. E-mail between the reviewer and Stephen E. Osman, Research Historian at the Minnesota Historical Society, May 30, 2006.

[2]. U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series 1, (Series 1, vol. 20, part 1, p. 175 and 207), vol. 34, part 2, p. 420.

[3]. *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, part 2, *Record of Events* (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1995), vol. 10, pp. 578ff.

[4]. James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom; The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 678.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:  
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

**Citation:** Joseph Fitzharris. Review of Cockrell, Thomas D.; Ballard, Michael B., eds., *Chickasaw, a Mississippi Scout for the Union: The Civil War Memoir of Levi H. Naron, As Recounted by R. W. Surby*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. November, 2006.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12519>

Copyright © 2006 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).