

Diary of Aaron Loder Mastin

INTRODUCTION

According to military records, which seem to differ from some family stories that have been posted at various places on the internet, Mastin first enlisted in the U.S. Army while living in DeWitt County, Illinois, on 7 Aug 1861 as a private in Company F for the 41st Illinois Volunteer Infantry. He was discharged for disability on 5 Jul 1862. The synopsis of his military record on civilwardata.com then says that he reenlisted on 4 Sep 1862 and served until he was mustered out on 21 Jun 1865 at Salisbury, N.C. This record also indicates that he was promoted to 1st Sergeant (no date given) and then later to 2nd Lieutenant. The entry for the promotion to 2nd Lieutenant is followed by a puzzling parenthetical entry “Not Mustered.”

The diary entries below cover only the first part of his service. They run from 1 Aug 1861 to 8 Nov 1861 and then from 13 Feb 1862 to 20 Apr 1862. According to one family story that last date was the day a revolver accidentally discharged into his left hand and resulted in “his mustering out of the Union Army, with two fewer fingers.” What these family sources apparently didn’t realize was that after a few additional months of recuperation he rejoined the same outfit and continued to serve until the end of the war. That such patriotism could be forgotten in family memory is surprising but, unfortunately, not all that uncommon.

The original of these diaries are said to have been saved by Aaron’s daughter Jane (Mastin) Miller. They were later transcribed by an unknown person, who posted them on the internet some years ago. The first part of the diary appears to have been a reconstruction from memory by Mastin at a later date, while the material from around 19 Aug 1861 forward appears to have been written down contemporaneously.

DIARY

I will now try to give you as far as my memory will serve me to do, some of the incidents of my first soldiering:

I enlisted the first day of August, 1861 at Camp Pugh, in Macon County, Illinois, in Capt. D. P. Brown’s company, Col. P.C. Pugh 41st Reg. Illinois Vol. And on the 5th day of the same month we was mustered into the United States service for three years if not sooner discharged. There was nothing of any importance occurred while here.

About the 10th we was ordered to be ready to march. Well, it was not long before we was on our way for Decatur, which was only one mile distant. We shipped on the Great Western railroad for Springfield, from there to Alton, arriving just at dark. The cars did not stop only a few minutes when we was on the move again.

We arrived at Illinois town opposite St. Louis, Mo. It was dark and raining when we got there, it being late at night. Well, the next thing after we was off the cars was to find a place to sleep. We got into the freight house and slept on the floor. The next day we got aboard a boat and

landed on the Missouri side of the river when we marched to the Marine Hospital just below St. Louis. We was there some two days and we drew our arms from the St. Louis arsenal. We camped a few days longer and drilled very hard, it being extremely hot weather.

On the 10th if my memory serves me right we was again ordered to march. Well, about eleven o'clock p.m. we marched to the wharf where lay the steamer, J. W. Graham, waiting for us to come aboard of her. We all embarked again at two o'clock, and we was on our way down the river Mississippi. We had quite a fine trip until about four in the evening we ran against a sand bar and in getting her off she had one of her boiler pumps break when she had to stop for repairs. Some of the boys went ashore and got some pawpaws to eat. I was down in the bottom when the bell rung for us to come aboard so we was again sailing down the river. By sundown we had not gone far when I took my blanket and laid down and soon fast asleep. When I woke the boat was tied up on account of the fog being so dense. About ten we was again ordered under way.

We arrived at Cape Girardeau and only stopped a few minutes. 10 miles from Cape we came in sight of one of the gun blockading boats and we hauled to and showed our papers. We passed down the river a few miles to a town called Commerce where the Rebels tried to fortify but the gun boat had shelled them out.

The gun boat from this first place accompanied us down to Birds [Point] where we landed and encamped. As we expected to stay here some time, we took great pains to clean our campground. About Saturday there we or our company was detailed to guard a bridge on the Cairo and Fulton Railroad. It is situated some seven miles from the point [Birds point]. We had a good time but did not see any Rebels to shoot at. We all arrived again at camp in safety.

Nothing of importance occurred until the 7th of September. I was detailed to work on a parade ground and in the evening we was again under marching orders. We got our uniforms today too. We got ready to march and by six o'clock we was on board of the J. W. Graham again.

We arrived at Paducah some time in the night and we lay out in the river until sometime about eight o'clock when we landed at the wharf boat. When we got there the town was almost deserted, and there was an apprehension of an attack on the place by the Rebels from Columbus. The Secesh flag had been waving there and the Secesh elements greatly predominated. We was greeted by the waving of hats and ladies waving their handkerchiefs.

This was the first that I set foot on Kentucky soil. We was busy for some two days angling and pitching our tents. Our camping ground was exceedingly beautiful, being on the river bank in the west part of town familiarly known as Jersey.

On the 13th we was ordered to have one day's rations ready to go to guard the wharf boat where there was an immense lot of provisions stored away which had been taken from the Secesh, they having it ready to ship to Columbus for the Rebel troops. We was not on the wharf boat long before we found a box of candy in there and we soon emptied all the contents in a short time. This was a long night for me for it was about my first guard duty. The four tents were also

on duty. We did not get anything to eat until after 2 o'clock but when we got back to camp we made it up in beans and hard bread.

On Sunday evening the 15th our captain (D.P. Brown) said for us to lay on our guns or have them where we could get them at a moments warning for there was some prospect for a fight. So at three in the morning the alarm was given by the firing of our pickets which made quite a snapping, so we was soon all out in the road but not to fight but to return to our tents with disappointment depicted on our countenance.

On the sixteenth about noon we was ordered to have our guns all ready and plenty of ammunition for it was reported that a large force was coming and within fifteen miles of the place, then what few citizens was left began to get away as fast as their legs would carry them. I saw several females crying and going on as if they were about to go into fits over the fear of having a fight here. Some of them having husbands, some fathers, some brothers, and some of them children in the rebel army.

We kept a good lookout all day but no Secesh came in sight. At night we lay on our arms until 3 o'clock we was again on the stir for the alarm was given. We was not long in getting into the line of battle this time it being less than five minutes after the order was given. Well, as before, we was doomed to disappointment again for we soon set down and lay down to rest there being no sign of the rebels anyways near. At daylight we was given in command of our respective captains and marched back to our camp again.

On the eighteenth I was on picket guard and had a fine time for I got into a cornfield and got a lot of roasting ears to roast, which was something new this year. Today was characterized by the death of the orderly sergent -- his name was Martin. He was the first death in our regiment.

On the 19th we went to the burial of Mr. Martin and it was a sad affair.

The 20th I was cook so there was nothing going on only cooking and calling.

Sunday, the 21st, I got a pass from my captain for me and one for my mess mate, whose name was F. M. Lane, to go out to town and to church but we was not out long before we heard that the captain wanted us back to camp to sign the payroll so we went or rather made a straight shirrtail for camp for we was in a great way to have some money to spend. So long in the evening we all fell in line and marched up to our colonel's headquarters where the paymaster was and got paid off up to the first day of September, which amounted to thirteen dollars and twenty cents, 10 of it in government money and the other in gold and silver.

On the 22nd I was on camp guard and the boys are running all over town (such of them as can get out) and buying themselves rich in pies, cakes, melons, and soda and ginger pop.

23rd, today my company (F) is again detailed to guard the wharf and as I was on guard yesterday I do not go, so I was in town and one place and then another.

The 26th, was on guard duty. It was chilly for the season. I am ill with chills and fever. If ever I thought of home and friends it is now.

30th, we moved camp in order to locate closer to the Missouri and the 12th Illinois Regiment. The new place is very pretty, it being timber so we had a shade for awhile.

October 1, I had a chill and was again sick all day.

The 2nd finds us all quiet. There is ten or twelve hundred on fatigue duty, throwing up breast works around the Marine hospital. They are going to erect a fort there. This morning I went out with one of the boys and got some persimmons of which the woods is full of them here at Paducah.

As I have not said anything to you about the floating bridge, here's how I will give a description of it. It is composed of flat boats run up side by side and sleepers or ties thrown across them and then planked over that again so I think when high water comes it will all wash away.

23rd, have had yellow jaundice. We got a dress suit of clothes, pants and jacket. We got a base drum and ten tenor drums today and practiced for our company.

November 1st, we was mustered in for pay.

November 5. Today we are under marching orders to be ready at two o'clock. At General Smith's headquarters we are to halt and be formed into a brigade. We arrived at 3 o'clock on the parade ground before the general's door but we was not there long by ourselves.

Soon came the 40th Illinois Volunteer commanded by Col. Hicks and the 8th Ill. Vol. Commanded by Col. A. Mercer and the 12th Ill. and Buell's battery of light cavalry. At five o'clock we halted for a rest. We did not rest long before we was again on the move. We camped ten miles from Paducah on the creek where there is plenty of good wood and water.

Nov. 6th, this morning at the rise of the Sun we was again on the move. At ten we came to a turnip patch which we done justice to by clearing the turnips all out. At 12 we got on the wrong road and went about two miles out of the way and had to march back again.

We have heard heavy cannoning in the direction of Belmont all day. My regiment is in the advance now. At 3 we came to large barns which had some two or three hundred bushels of apples in them. We got as many of them as we wanted. We was very tired and our feet was so sore that a great many of us could not wear our shoes. We are resting awhile four miles from Milburn, and the boys are amusing themselves by killing chickens and such like. The cannonading is still heard.

Our boys are very lively. They are in hopes of getting into a fight soon for the talk is that we are going to Columbus. We were soon again on the march at 6 o'clock and marched to Milburn arriving about 8 in the p.m. where we camped for the night with many a sore foot a crippling

behind. Today two men out of my company has fell back behind and did not get up with the regiment. It is supposed that we are going to fight and they was afraid of getting shot.

Nov. 7, this morning we got orders to march back to Paducah, which caused a great deal of complaints by some pronouncing it a perfect bore. We got started back early this morning and marched three miles and halted at a large orchard and got some apples. Our provisions being all gone.

We was soon on our way again. We pressed a team of horses this morning to haul our baggage into camp which relieved us very much. When we was one mile further we halted at a small stream to get water and some boys found a barrel of molasses which they soon transferred to their canteens in safety here. One man got several geese, chickens, hogs, sheep and such like. At 12 we again halted and got some water. We marched on to within 12 miles of Paducah and halted for the night.

Nov. 8, this morning it has been raining some and we are on our way to Paducah. We arrived there at 4 o'clock in safety and was complimented for our good behavior by our colonel and was then dismissed and went to our tents and had a grand old supper"

Note: The diary stops here until February 13th 1862 when he was recovered enough from his illness and new workload to begin writing again.

"Feb. 13, we break up the 41st hospital and turned our things over to the surgeon of the 48th and 14 of the boys that I have been nursing was sent into their hospital and I am sent over as a nurse this evening. One of the 41st came back from Fort Donaldson [Fort Donelson] on the Cumberland.

Feb. 14, this morning there is snow on the ground and it is still snowing and is turning colder. One of the boys got a furlow for three months. He has had sore eyes for a long time and is getting a discharge from the service.

The surgeon of the 48th is in a great way for us to move our men. He says that there is not room for so many, he having a great many sick men.

We went to an old house that had been occupied by the 12th Illinois hospital this evening. We again moved the sick men. The house was so bad that Buck Posley, our ward master, went to see the medical director to have them moved. He got back about an hour after dark with a wagon and took them to the female seminary. That building is being fitted up as a hospital.

Feb 15, our forces that is up at the river has been fighting hard at Fort Donaldson [Fort Donelson]. We are now looking for some 100 to 200 wounded from the battlefield today.

Today I and P.T. Posley is detailed as nurses at the Seminary, and C. Posley is also detailed as druggist. This evening I am at the Seminary. Posley and I is going to nurse together. We have thirteen patients. There is one with small pox in the building but they are going to send him away.

Feb. 17, this morning between three and four o'clock there was 40 arrived from Donaldson [Donelson]. They was from several regiments, some from Illinois and Ohio and Iowa. There is but few of them dangerously wounded. One Lieut. from the 48th Ill. Vol. is here; he is wounded in the thigh. They was still fighting when they left, but it is the general impression they would not hold out long. We are looking for more wounded at any time now.

Feb. 18, this morning will long be remembered by the brave ones of our union for it characterizes one of the most dangerous blows that has been given to the Rebellion (the fall of Fort Donaldson). The fort was surrendered this morning with more than 10 thousand prisoners of war with all their arms and baggage and ordinance stores, and what is better still the capture of one of the old traitors. His name was Buckner.

Generals Pillow and Floyd have made their escape down south toward Nashville, Tennessee. We have also taken over 100 guns, some of them had been taken from our boys at the Bull Run disaster. Some of them is Gifffield cannon.

Feb. 19, today I have 27 patients. Some of them is sick and some of them is wounded. Three of the 41st boys got a furlow today. They will leave for home this evening.

Feb. 20, today it has rained hard all day, and I have not got any news from the 41st .

February 21, A. Graham has come down from DeWitt to look for the boys from that place, he did not find any of them at this place and he is going to Fort Donaldson to look for them there.

Yesterday morning all of the Indiana boys left here for Evansville, Indiana. I have 24 men under my care this morning. C. C. Jordan died, he belonged to the 31st Indiana company. He was wounded in the shoulder and breast.

February 22, today there is two men from Tennessee has come to nurse. They had to leave there on account of their Union sentiments. Today one of the wounded men was sent to the general hospital.

February 23, this morning I got a box of provisions from home. There was five roasted chickens in it but they had all spoiled but there was some apples, apple butter, and cakes which I done justice to.

24th, clear, pleasant weather. The number of this hospital is 7th division. Dr. Kirch has been in charge of it today. Dr. S.A Williams of St. Louis is here and (he) is going to take charge of this hospital today.

Two men died late this evening. One of them, J.B. Colvin, died of a wound in the thigh having received the wound at Fort Donaldson, the other was H. Whitmer, disease unknown.

Feb. 25, beautiful morning. Surgeon Wilmers of St. Louis took charge of this hospital. He also appointed me ward master.

Feb. 26, it has been raining hard all night. H. Benson died today of pneumonia, it being the prevalent disease now in this (St. John's) hospital.

Feb. 27, fine morning. I am in good spirits at present. B. F. Fletcher died this morning of diphtheria, the first case of that disease we have had.

Feb. 28, today I am well and the health of the patients seem to be growing better this fine morning.

March 1st, Spring comes in with a warm cloudy day. Pneumonia seems to be doing its final work. Several of our brave soldiers seems not able to stand it.

March 2, today all is dark and dreary but the vivid flash of lightening and the heavy thunder reminds me of the summer storms. The pouring rains brings back thoughts of bygone days and merry ways. We have admitted thirty patients today.

March 3rd, we have positive news of the evacuation of Columbus. They have taken all of their guns with them or have thrown a great many of them in the river. They have left large quantities of ammunition there.

March 4, still the cold and chilly blast brings into requisition the overcoat as an indispensable requisite to comfort. G.W. Newton died today of typhus fever.

March 5, a spring sun dawned on us this morning but was of short duration for it was soon obscured by heavy clouds and the snow has already begun to fall. We have several cases of smallpox attached to this hospital.

March 8, spring weather is now smiling again on people who have long wished for the genial rays to drive the winter clouds away. S.P. Ezad died today of typhoid fever.

March 9. Pleasant morning. Most of the wounded have recovered and are able to go home on furlows. Plummer died today, disease unknown, as he was dying when admitted.

March 10, the number of patients in St. John's is now 126 and still on the increase.

March 11, spring in all her charms has now begun to assume her best as mistress of the season. Two men died today, L.S. Thompson and Rubb, disease pneumonia.

March 12, the warm bright sun proclaims the return of spring but the day is marred by death's triumph over many brave soldiers fighting for the good of his country again.

I have to record the death of two of our boys. One died of smallpox at the best, the other one was W. Lewty, he was wounded in the head at the battle of Fort Donaldson.

March 13, vegetation now puts forth to greet a genial sun. We have two or three men that is very sick today.

March 14, we are in receipt of new cots today. We are making arrangements to accommodate 100 patients. Two men died today, M. McKinney, diresipelis and T. Whitcum, pneumonia.

March 15, today we are ordered to make arrangements for to accommodate some wounded. There is a battle anticipated somewhere soon. Sam Kauntz died of double pneumonia.

March 16, the bright sun begins to start into making vegetation loveliest hues and bids the gentle warblers to tune their songs of mirth for spring is sure here.

We got our cots today but could only have 35 instead of 100 as we was counting on. This was on account of us not having room without putting them too close together.

March 17, surgeon Wardner and Dr. Hawthorne's wives is now stopping at this post, rather distinguished and acceptable company. They are agreeable, benevolent and charitable, they have the good respect of patients and the help also.

Fairly died today. He is to be sent home to his friends.

March 18, clear as a bell, warm as a summer, beautiful as Eden, how sickening it is to be cooped up here as if I were a prisoner instead of a patient in the walls of this hospital amongst all the maladies that human beings are subject to.

March 19, heavy rains last night. Surgeon McNeal came down from the 41st . He says that the boys are in bad health. Three patients more today.

March 20th, today I was somewhat startled at the doctor pronouncing one of the patients as having the malignant typhus fever. I have taken all of the patients out of the room but him and took all the beds and bed clothing out too and sprinkled the floors to keep off such diseases as are catching. I also sprinkled the yards with copperous dissolved in water.

March 21, the man that was said to have the malignant fever was a mistake as he has got the scurvy. There was 18 admitted to St. John's yesterday and eight today. Some of them is very low with pneumonia.

March 22, there has been one admitted today.

March 23, today we have one death, W.A. Carpenter, Co. J. 2nd had disease typhoid pneumonia.

March 24, today we have some news from island No. 10 and our doctor has taken a notion to go down and see the fight. He has got Dr. Thompson of the Regt. Ohio Vol. to take charge of the St. John's until he gets back.

March 25, Dr. Wilman did not get off yesterday for Island No. 10, he has gone today. We have got some time and me and a steward is going to whitewash a room today. D. Pursley of Co. K 36th died today, disease diarrhea and pneumonia.

March 26th, the weather is fine at this time. The steward, the clerk and the druggist and myself drew a dress suit from the quartermaster, price \$.73.

March 27th, today we are scouring up and some of the nurses is hauling coal today. We also moved the patients over here from the branch called rubeola ward and all the clothing and stoves.

March 29, I have been taking an invoice of the property that belonged to the St. John's hospital which I find a very tedious job.

March 30th, the weather is very bad. It having rained some through the night and still raining. I received a letter today from my brother H. H. Mastin [Hiram H. Mastin]. He says that my brother's wife is very sick, she is having a congestive chill.

I give a copy of my orders from the surgeon in charge of St. John's hospital, Paducah, Kentucky:

The Ward Master will take charge of all the effect of the patients and keep an account (as in Form No. 7) in connection with the task. He will take an inventory of all things in the hospital at the end of the month. This includes the cooking utensils and everything not needed will be handed over to the steward and an account kept of it also [report] to steward anything lost. Also he will have the nurse report to him every morning the number of vacant beds in their respective wards and he will then report the whole number of beds vacant to the clerk. Also he will keep an inventory of the effect of the dead. See that the nurses do their duty in every respect. Keep boots, hats, and clothes out of the beds. [Signed] T.N. Wilmans, surgeon in charge.

March 30, today is Sunday and I have been to Catholic church. As this is the first time I was ever at one of their meetings, it seemed kind of odd indeed; the old priest looked quite comic, he put me in mind of the Indians with his old jacket on.

March 31, this morning I helped to clean up and to scrub and then went with J.A. Posley to take a walk. We went to a Mr. Madison's nursery and garden. The garden was very beautiful, many of the flowers was in full bloom. He has a large nursery and a couple of greenhouses. The lady took us around and showed us the flowers and told us the names of most of them and invited us back to pay her another visit. This evening, we lost another man, his name was J.D. Rich.

April 1st, last night we had a very heavy storm here, blowing down fences and unroofing houses. The streets this morning are full of railing, tin roofs blown off the houses. The weather has cleared up and we had a pleasant day.

April 3rd, this morning Dr. Wilmans arrived from Island No. 10, he reports the siege still going on. The federals have got several batteries planted below the Rebels thereby cutting off their retreat down the river.

April 4th, today is warm and pleasant. We have had one death today. His name was J.W. Robinson, 52nd Inf., disease pneumonia.

April 5th, this morning is warm and pleasant. J.A. Posley and myself took a walk out to the graveyard. The graveyard contains two hundred fifty deceased soldiers. I saw the places where they had just dug a long trench and there was 19 in one and 21 in another one, all the rest I saw was buried single. While out there I got to see some of the boys from where I was raised in Shariton County, Ohio. I got to hear from an uncle or two I had not seen or heard from for eight years.

April 6, this morning is very pleasant. We have sent twelve of the convalescents to another hospital. I thought this morning I would go to church but the deaths of one of my men prevented me. His name was Samuel Fitts, K. 38th Ill. Vol., disease congestive fever and erysipelas.

This afternoon I went down to where the 21st used to be camped. And when I got back there was another man dead. His name was Henry Boyd, Co. H 57th Ill. Vol., tonight I went to church. The 1st lieutenant in the 6th Col. preached a good sermon.

April 7th, this morning we are looking for the commander of the first to be around to see our hospital so we have been cleaning up.

April 8th, I am fixing up this evening. We heard that island No. 10 was unconditionally surrendered and that General Grant had engaged the enemy up close to Corinth and had defeated them. We look forward with great anxiety.

April 10, today the weather is cold and chilly. The wounded from Pittsburg is coming down today. This evening we have 19 more in the hospital, 17 of them being wounded at Pittsburg.

April 11, it has been raining all day. The wounded are still growing and going up and down the Ohio River.

April 12, today it is raining and the weather is cold for the season. This evening we received ten more wounded from Pittsburg. They are most of them dangerous. There is only one from the 41st. His name is Deboris of Ohio.

April 13, today is Sunday and a nice day. I have been thinking that I would go to church today but I could not leave tonight.

April 14, today I was awakened at four o'clock to lay out a dead man. His name was Bryan Davis, K. 28th Ill. wounded through the lungs. Since writing the above a man died. His name was John Denbow, 78th Ohio. He was upwards 77 years old. His son is also in the hospital; he is over 45 years old. [Original transcriptionist had "18th Ohio," assume this was due to similarity of

written "1" and "7" in some 19th Century handwriting; also John's age was 65, not 77, this was an error by Mastin and is kept in the transcript to be true to the original.]

April 15, the weather is very pleasant today. This afternoon one of our men had two of his fingers amputated. He had been wounded at Pittsburg. This evening Al Poosman of Co. G. 52 volunteers, died, disease pneumonia.

April 16, this morning there is some appearance of rain. There was another amputation today. It was one of the 11th boys, and his leg had been taken off just below the knee. Dr. Wilmers performed the operation. He (the patient) is very low and is not expected to survive the operation. Since writing the above the amputation case has died. He died at 8 p.m.

April 17th, today our hospital has changed hands and there is another doctor by the name of Stahl has taken charge and Dr. Wilmans is going to take charge of the Gothice hospital, a change which I am very much opposed to.

April 18th, today it has been raining almost all day. There has been one more amputation performed today, his name is Hotbran. He was wounded in the hand and had to have it taken off.

April 19, this morning I was down in town and was walking along the street when I heard a voice calling me by name. I looked around and one of the boys from the nation that had been there on furlough had got back and L.B. Young was along with him. I got a letter from home and was otherwise much pleased to see them.

April 20, this morning the boys that I spoke of yesterday (L.B. Young and H. Murray) have started up the Tennessee.

I met with an accident this morning by the accidental discharge of a revolver, the ball passing through two of my fingers on the left hand, which is quite painful just now.