

The Adirondack Record
Au Sable Forks, N. Y.

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R. P. McKee, Sec'y and Business Mgr.

**Veterans of
The Civil War**



HEMAN EARL BAKER

The subject of this sketch is a resident of Au Sable Forks and was born in Peru May 4, 1844. His paternal ancestor was Henry Baker (a farmer and captain in the militia) whose birthplace was probably somewhere in the town of Au Sable, Clinton county. His mother was probably a native of Peru, Clinton county. His records of both sides of the house are somewhat obscure. His mother's maiden name was Clara Wright.

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boys were all anxious to get a look at the famous place. We marched rapidly forward for about a mile and a half without any obstruction, when, all of a sudden, "Johnnie" got an eye on us, and the battle of Chapin's Farm began.

It was then the boys began using their seven-shooters for the first time, and they worked well. The enemy was soon flying toward his main line. In front of us, approached through a quiet strip of woods and then through a hundred rods of opening, was Fort Harrison, strong and powerful looking, backed up by a good line of breastworks, six or seven miles long. Three or four rebel rams lay in the river about a half mile in the rear. We halted long enough to form the charging column, and then started for the foe with a yell. The iron flew from fort and gunboats, with lots of rifle lead or ballast right in the teeth of our boys, but we managed to reach the fort, and were soon clambering over the top of the parapet. The first lieutenant of the 96th New York Volunteers, who was on our right in the charge, was going over the top of the works, but was met by a "Reb" with his gun ready for him. The lieutenant did not have time to draw his revolver, but, on the instant, he picked up a pebble from the top of the parapet, threw it at Johnnie and hit him squarely between the eyes. He instantly dropped his gun and ran.

Another scene exhibiting much personal daring was enacted in another part of the fort. Michael Finigan, of our regiment, held a rebel colonel at point of bayonet, and ordered him to get up on top of the parapet and give three cheers for the Union. At first the colonel refused, but the repeated command of Mike, accompanied with the declaration that he would kill him right there if he did not, he reconsidered the matter and did as commanded. For this Mike was presented with a silver medal about four weeks after by General Butler, commander of the Army of the James.

In the battle our loss was heavy in privates and officers. The highest in rank was General Bowman, commander of our brigade. But we had driven them out of their first strong line and held possession. There were two corps engaged in this fight, the Twenty-fourth Army Corps, all white, and the Twenty-fifth Army Corps, all colored except the commissioned officers. And I will here state that the colored soldiers did good fighting. Although it has been stated that they were not good soldiers, they stood the fire well that day and lost heavily. We were tired that night, and could not rest for we were in a very exposed position. The enemy had another strong line about one hundred rods in the rear of the one we had taken, and were receiving reinforcements during the night, and the line we had taken was open to them and to the gunboats in the river, so we went to work with pick and shovel. We expected them on the morrow, for they were very angry on bidding us good-night, therefore we went to work with might and main and by daybreak next morning had quite a little shelter on the brow of the hill overlooking a ravine which they must cross to get to us.

At daylight next morning their sharpshooters began work. They had an excellent chance, and many a brave man went down by their hands. They had an abundance of artillery—ten or twelve Cohorn mortars—and they all began their music. The gunboats sent able delegates over to us to represent them, and, on the whole, we were well entertained until about 8 o'clock, when everything quieted and they formed for a charge in the lines of battle, and started with a yell, coming down the ravine in splendid order. We let them come until they had risen about half way up the slope on our side of the ravine, then we were ordered to fire. It was hard for them now (they suffered worse than we the day before), for our boys were working their self-shooters for all they were worth. They were surprised at the terrible hail of lead that was being hurled among them by the small number of men they saw on our low line of earthworks. We had hastily constructed the night before. They turned to go back, leaving nearly half their men on the field behind wounded, dead and dying. We did not let them go quietly, but sent a steady stream of lead after them until they were sheltered by some timbers that stood between the two lines. They soon formed again in close column behind this timber for another charge. They were being reinforced every moment. We could see them coming into their main line, two or three on one mule; and it was said their officers dealt out to their men gunpowder and whiskey; at any rate, they were soon formed, and started more furious than at first with that peculiar howl the "Johnnies" were noted for. They seemed determined this time to hoist us out at all hazards. On they came. We let them get at about the same place as before, when again the seven-shooters were put at work with the same result. This should have satisfied their commander that we could not be budged easily. But not so. They must try it again.

All was staked on this final charge; and right over the same ground as the previous charges, and over their dead and dying comrades (they had taken but very little pains to pick up the wounded) the charges came and were repulsed. They were nearer success than they thought, for our boys were short of ammunition. Two horses were killed while bringing up the ammunition wagon that held our cartridges. But the ordnance officer was equal to the occasion and saved the day. The rebels were driven back to stay. But during all this time their sharpshooters in the trees were making holes in our

men who had to be more or less exposed. Their distance was short, and with their heavy telescope rifles they brought their man nearly every time. But in a day or two we got some sharpshooters into position, and they occasionally tumbled their rebel friends out of a tree, and thus thinned them out a little, so that we could raise our heads for a breath of fresh air once in a while in the daytime. Most of our work, however, had to be done in the night.

For two weeks this condition of affairs remained. They would not bury their dead nor allow us to; only as we advanced our picket line in the dark could we bury their dead inside of our lines. Those that lay in front of our vidette line remained as they fell for about two weeks in the burning sun. The terrible stench from these decaying bodies was unendurable. Their defeat was such a hard blow to them, cause they perhaps thought it a punishment to us to leave things so. I do not wish to accuse them of heartlessness to their men, but it seems heartless on the face of it in this case. But a few days after two weeks their officers came out with a flag of truce, and our officers met them about half way between the two lines and agreed to stop all firing on pickets, after which the "Johnnies" returned to their lines and sent out squads of men with pick and shovel, and buried the poor fellows. Was not this delay cruel? It was bad enough for those who had to stand in the trenches and endure the horrible stench, but when the feelings of the relatives and friends of the dead could they have known that their bodies were decaying in the hot sun two weeks are considered, it becomes a crime. I think this act of inhumanity had a great tendency to thin their ranks in our immediate front, as hardly a night passed after truce was established that we did not receive from twenty-five to one hundred deserters.

Their mode of coming into our lines was a source of pleasure to us in more ways than one, as it enabled us to know that their force of available men was being weakened and there were many amusing incidents connected with their appearance before our picket line. Some came creeping in on their hands and knees, cautiously, until within a few yards of our line, when they would try to make us understand that they were friendly and wanted to come in. It required some manoeuvring on their part at first, as we did not know just what it meant and we did not want to fire on them and thus create unnecessary alarm. But we soon became accustomed to apparitions of this kind, and they were of nightly occurrence.

One day it had been very quiet all along the lines. We had passed compliments with "Johnnie," and a good feeling had sprung up between us. Presently "Johnnie" was seen to pull off his straps lay down his gun, grasp a newspaper printed in Richmond called "The Richmond Whig," and start out, boldly swinging this deadly instrument over his head as he advanced toward our lines. Our boys were not long in comprehending his meaning, and quickly seizing a New York Tribune and going through a like manoeuvre, we met "Johnnie" about half way between the two lines, and had a short friendly chat, exchanging weapons. Then we separated, "Johnnie" going back to read of his own defeat, which was true, and we read of a "glorious victory" for "Johnnie" which was not true. It was rarely that "Johnnie" met defeat according to the Richmond papers.

About this time (October 15) we moved to the right of the captured fort, and the name was changed to Fort Burnham, and a battery of field pieces and one Whitworth gun occupied the fort. We kept steadily strengthening our line of fortifications, anticipating an attack from the enemy at an early date. They did not like our close proximity to their headquarters, but we were bound to stay at all hazards. While encamped on this entrenchment a little episode happened which caused considerable merriment in our regiment. A first lieutenant acting adjutant got rather full of "tangiefoot" and, as is generally the case under such influence, became very patriotic. There had been large rations issued to the men in the regiment, as they had been working hard with shovel and pick, and were entitled to a gill of whiskey each. The lieutenant above mentioned early in the evening went clambering or striding through the camp with a long sabre, with the straps let down, dragging on the ground, meandering along, occasionally getting it under his feet, which caused him to make some irregular strides. He was taken to the lieutenant-colonel, who had command of the regiment at the time, and he was reprimanded for his conduct; for which he took umbrage and started for his horse, got astride of the animal some way, headed for the breastworks, while all the boys looked on convulsed with laughter, tried to force the dumb animal over the top of them, saying he was going to whip the whole Southern Confederacy. He did not succeed in getting over and was finally put under arrest; but nothing came of it, as he was an excellent officer, a brave soldier and well liked by every man in the regiment, as he had won his way up from the ranks.

A night or two after this I was on picket. It began to rain and was fearfully dark. I was trying to get under the dry side of a pine sapling, when suddenly the report of a gun from our line came to my ears. The ball whizzed close to my head. Not thinking there was any one very near, I felt somewhat startled to hear "Johnnie" speak up not more than four or five rods in front of me: "Look out there, Yank, I'll send you the mate to that." But all was quiet the remainder of the night and until daylight, when one "Johnnie" was seen to start from his vidette fast for our lines. He had an open space across an open cornfield to run in plain view of both lines, why he delayed so long is not known, as deserters generally managed to reach our lines before daylight, but on he came. The "Rebs" saw him, then bang! went a loaded messenger after him, hitting him in the hand. No halt, a little more steam forced on, jumping sideways to the right and left, hat off and in shirt sleeves, "Johnnie" was nearing our lines when bang! bang! came two shots, one going through "Johnnie's" shoulder. He sprang into the air and fell. Some of our boys in the main

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line saw him fall, ran out with a stretcher, picked him up and carried him over the earthworks. The "Rebs" knew they had lost a man, but thought he would do us little good.

Soon after this a sad event took place which called out the whole brigade. A soldier had enlisted in the 12th New Hampshire some time in '62. He was then in the Army of the Potomac, he got sick of it and in some way got away and back into the State of Maryland, and again enlisted in the 5th Maryland Volunteers, at that time down in the Army of the James. Time went on and troops were shifted from one place to another until the 12th New Hampshire, the 5th Maryland, the 9th Vermont, the 96th New York, and our regiment, the 118th New York, were brigaded together, bringing the two regiments together that the soldier had belonged to. This soldier was carrying luncheon out into the picket line and had to pass some of the 12th that were on the line. They saw him and knew him and talked with him. He went back with his empty pails, and that night tried to escape to the rear, but was caught down at the river while trying to secure a boat to cross with, and was brought back to headquarters, court-martialled and sentenced to be shot. A short time following the entire brigade was ordered to turn out in light marching order. None of us could imagine what this was for, as we had heard nothing about this affair. It had all been done so quietly. Some said we were to charge the enemy, but as we could see no preparations in any part of the line except our brigade, we could not understand it. We were under motion and headed toward the enemy. Out through the breastworks we went, but not directly toward the enemy but parallel with our own lines. Behind some timber we were manoeuvred to form a hollow square with one side open. When this was accomplished we were ordered to stand, resting on our guns. We stood thus for fifteen or twenty minutes when we saw approaching a small body of men and officers—twelve men with fixed bayonets. Directly behind them came a man with bowed head and halting gait, an officer on one side and chaplain on the other, some field officers on horseback in the rear. As they came up, one side of the square was opened to let them pass through and then closed up again after them. On they went through the center and up to the newly made grave, with a rough board coffin that stood parallel with the grave. The twelve men with fixed bayonets halted when within about twelve or fifteen yards from the grave, the officers and chaplain marching the soldier forward while his legs seemed so weak he could hardly move along. He finally reached the coffin and was set down upon it. The officer placed a white cap of cotton material over his eyes. The chaplain remained with the soldier a few moments, and then stepped to one side. Silence reigned for a moment, when the officer in low tones ordered the guard: "Take aim! Fire!" and the poor fellow had paid the penalty of desertion. This was the first soldier I had seen shot for desertion, and I hope I shall never see another. But near the spot where this poor fellow lies are quite a number of graves of a similar kind.

On the evening of October 27, one month from the taking of Fort Harrison, we were ordered to fall in, while the long roll was sounding all along the lines, in heavy marching order. Now everything is hurry-burry, canteens to look up and fill; haversacks to be packed with hardtack and coffee; eighty rounds of cartridges to pack into the cartridge box; blankets to be rolled. Finally all this is accomplished, and the company is formed, then the regiment. Then the order comes: "Shoulder arms! Right face! Right shoulder shift! Forward, march!" and we were off, but where and for what is only known to the officers. But we are headed toward the rear. Our backs are toward Richmond. We do not go in this direction long—a mile or so. It is now about 10 o'clock at night and very dark, but the fires are soon lighted and coffee steaming and then a little sleep. About 2 o'clock in the morning, after a hasty cup of coffee, we are told we must soon be on the move, and so we are, our blankets rolled and tied at the ends, making a loop to go over the shoulder, each man falling in at his respective stack. We are started. As we march toward the west we stumble somewhat in the darkness, but finally daylight appears, and we hear heavy cannonading on our left. We pass along apparently in the rear of this firing. "Boom! Boom!" We are coming nearer. We are to the right of the whole moving column. The command is given to halt.

Soon our regiment only is ordered forward. The ranks are opened for us to pass through. The boys say to us as we pass along, "Give it to them!" We begin to expect there is something for us to do. The under jaw comes up hard against the upper, the teeth are set tightly together. But why we especially, the rest remaining beh-

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Oh, it is these seven-shooters, that's why we are preferred.

"Forward and deploy!" Some look a little paler than common. That is a bullet. The Johnnies have seen us, but we are advancing steadily. One of our boys sights the enemy and all begin to hurry. There is smoke rising from a number of bushes along our front, and the ping of bullets is now quite frequent. Soon our boys are working their rifles, and Johnnie must run to his main line. We are told to steady up a little, there is going to be a charge by the cavalry—the 11th Pennsylvania. On they come from behind some woods. Their charge was nearly parallel with the skirmish line. They cut off some of the enemy's pickets, and one of them was captured. We had now got a little in advance of where their picket line had been established. "Boom!" came their first cannon shot. The cavalry halted. We had now got a little in advance of where their was contrary to the general plan of attack; but on we went right down under their guns with forty or fifty rods of their main line. It was raining. The skirmishers halted here and sought cover from whatever fire could find, and kept up a steady fire, expecting every moment to be supported by a charge which never came for some reason or another, except a very faint attempt. There were no lines formed in the rear; but as the day of the skirmish line, then stopped and went back, and that was the last we saw of them. The Johnnies were being led into us for all they were worth and night was coming on, and it seemed impossible for one of the skirmishers to leave his post, and there were few that did except for the other way to Richmond as prisoners. We had about 250 men that morning and all that could be found that night were twenty-five and those were mainly with the colors, which were a little in the rear, being on the reserve. Of course there were a few who straggled and were not in the fight. This came near wiping out of existence the 118th Regiment, but not quite, for we did exist to the end of the war. The whole command was defeated and fell back to their old position for the winter. This was called the second battle of Fair Oaks. I suppose there were 25,000 men engaged at Seven Pines and Fair Oaks on October 28, 1864.

H. E. BAKER.