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WISCONSIN'S “ABOLITION REGIMENT”

The Twenty-second Volunteer Infantry in Kentucky, 1862–1863

By William M. Fliss

In early November 1862 a young runaway slave sought refuge with the Twenty-second Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry at its encampment three miles north of Lexington, Kentucky. Recently sold to a new master, the eighteen-year-old woman said she was fleeing impending servitude in one of the city's brothels.¹ Though certainly not the first Kentucky slave to seek refuge with the advancing Union Army, she appears to have been one of few women to take that risk. During the early years of the war, runaway slaves, like their colonial and antebellum counterparts, were overwhelmingly young men.² Her presence created a dilemma for Colonel William L. Utley, commander of the Twenty-second Wisconsin. Unlike the several male fugitives who had joined the regiment, an attractive young woman could hardly be expected to move freely among the soldiers, providing assistance with cooking and odd jobs. Unwilling to turn her out of the camp, Colonel Utley decided to send her north to freedom. Disguised as a Union soldier, the woman traveled safely to Ohio in a wagon driven by two men from the regiment.

This episode is one of several fascinating stories involving

Despite the impression that the angle of the gun held by Sergeant Jesse Berch (left) might give, the unnamed woman in this 1862 daguerreotype was far from being a hostage. Berch, the quartermaster of the Wisconsin Twenty-second Volunteer Infantry Regiment, and Frank Rockwell (right), the regiment's postmaster, escorted the fugitive slave from Kentucky to Cincinnati, where the three posed for the camera. The men returned to their comrades in Kentucky; the woman fled to Racine—and freedom.



WHS Archives, Name File, WHi(X3)2380

Colonel William L. Utley, commander of the Abolition Regiment, proved a tenacious leader on the moral battleground regarding slavery and freedom. In actual battle, he experienced less success.

the Twenty-second Wisconsin Infantry and the fugitive slaves of Kentucky. The Bluegrass State became a major battleground between North and South in the Civil War. It never joined the Confederacy, but many of its people sympathized with the Southern cause, and they vehemently opposed any meddling with the state's quarter-million slaves. Recognizing the state's strategic importance, President Lincoln took pains to keep Kentucky from joining the Confederate ranks. He purposely excluded its slaves from his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of September 22, 1862. This document proclaimed that all slaves living in rebel territories would be freed on January 1, 1863. Because Kentucky had not joined the rebellion, however, its slaves would remain in bondage.

During the fall and winter of 1862–1863, many of Kentucky's slaves sought refuge with the advancing Union army. The Twenty-second Wisconsin Infantry harbored several of them, and although it was not the only midwestern regiment to do so, its absolute refusal to return the slaves to bondage when pressured by civil and military authorities set the unit apart from most other Union formations.³ By the time it arrived outside Lexington in November, the unit was widely known as “the Abolition Regiment” through newspaper accounts and word of mouth. Why these Wisconsin men would take such an uncompromising stance toward slavery in Kentucky is a question worthy of exploration.

Mustered into service on September 2, 1862, the Twenty-second Wisconsin was among the dozens of Northern regi-

ments recruited that summer in response to President Lincoln's request for 300,000 additional volunteers. The federal government expected each state to provide a portion of this total, and Wisconsin's quota amounted to five regiments of approximately one thousand men each. The flood of volunteers that swept the state's recruiting offices in 1861 had slackened by this time, forcing Governor Edward Salomon to divide the state into five districts by popula-

tion, making each district responsible for providing one of the regiments. The Twenty-second Regiment originated in the southeasternmost district, comprising Racine, Kenosha, Walworth, Waukesha, Jefferson, Rock, and Green Counties. Ultimately, Rock and Racine Counties each recruited three of the regiment's ten companies, and Green and Walworth Counties provided two companies each.⁴

Working through the Wisconsin adjutant general, Governor Salomon exhorted local communities to hold meetings to recommend citizens whose status or popularity might attract recruits. Such men were advised to apply to the governor for an officer's commission. Responsibility for coordinating these local efforts fell to the regiment's commanding officer, a forty-eight-year-old Republican politician from Racine named William Laurence Utley. Although Utley himself did not accept the governor's commission of his regimental command until July 17, rumors of his appointment had already been circulating, prompting the city's *Weekly Journal* to comment that no person in the state would be able to raise a regiment more quickly.⁵

It is true that Utley's name was known throughout southeastern Wisconsin. Governor Alexander W. Randall had appointed him adjutant general in 1861, a post Utley held until the governor left office at the end of the year to accept an ambassadorship from President Lincoln. Utley had the unenviable task in 1861 of managing the chaos of the state's initial recruitment efforts; by the end of the year he had overseen the formation of Wisconsin's first nineteen infantry regiments. Prior to his appointment as adjutant general, Utley had been serving in the state senate. He returned to that body



Kentucky Historical Society

Left: George Robertson, chief justice of the Kentucky Supreme Court in 1862, whose legal conflict with the Abolition Regiment took over a decade to resolve. Right: Caleb D. Pillsbury, chaplain of the Twenty-second Wisconsin.



WHS Archives, Name File, WHI(X3)18315

at the beginning of 1862 and remained there until July, when he accepted command of the Twenty-second Regiment.

The details of Colonel Utley's early life are sketchy, but we know he was born in Massachusetts in 1814. When Utley was four years old, his family moved to Ohio where he remained until he was twenty-one. Seeking educational opportunities, Utley left home and moved to New York State. He appears to have led a wan-

dering life in New York, never settling down into a permanent career. He married Louisa Wing of Alexander, New York, in July 1840, and, after a brief return to Ohio in 1844, the couple moved westward with their son, Hamilton. They settled in Racine, and Utley began supporting his family through a variety of professions: as a portrait painter, a tavern keeper, and the manager of a daguerreotype gallery.⁶ Utley appears to have been a man in search of a niche in life. His personal correspondence has not survived, but his obituaries depict him as a genuine humanitarian who was unafraid to voice his strongly held beliefs.⁷ It is not surprising then that the abolitionist Utley—in a period when slavery dominated public debate—sought his destiny in the political ring.

Utley had been a Democrat when he first settled in Racine, but in the mid-1840s his abolitionist sympathies led him to abandon the Democrats in favor of the Free Soil party, which strongly opposed the expansion of slavery into the newly opened western territories. He was elected marshal of Racine under that ticket in 1848, but unlike many Northern Democrats who merely flirted with Free Soilism in the late 1840s, Utley remained committed to the movement. He was elected to the state legislature in 1850, and two years later he accepted appointment as adjutant general. His experience in managing the state militia at that time explains why Governor Randall asked him to return to the position to oversee recruitment of Wisconsin's volunteers when the war began. Utley had joined the new Republican Party at the time of his election to the state senate in 1860, earning a reputation as a staunch antislavery man.⁸

Despite the recognition his name evoked, Utley faced dif-

faculties filling his regiment in the summer of 1862. Many Wisconsinites were unwilling to enlist during the busy summer harvest, especially since recruits were expected to remain in boarding houses until their local company finished mustering and went into camp. Other men may have hesitated to join in the hope that the state government would be forced to increase its enlistment bounty, a cash signing bonus promised to new recruits. A third obstacle to enlistment was the governor's prerogative to appoint all of the regiment's officers. With its companies formed locally as homogeneous units, the Twenty-second Wisconsin had the feel of a militia regiment, and the old republican tradition held that militiamen should enjoy the liberty to elect their own officers. Private Harvey Reid of Union Grove—whose letters and diaries constitute the single largest source of information on the regiment—was among twenty-one men in the Racine Union Guards (later designated Company A) who were so angry at being denied the right to elect their officers that they considered returning home to form their own company.⁹

Governor Salomon followed through on his promise to grant captaincies to prominent citizens in the district's larger communities, like Racine, Janesville, Beloit, and Monroe. He also granted recruiting commissions to lieutenants with the understanding that, by achieving a high enlistment rate, the lieutenants would receive appointment into the companies as line officers. Salomon hoped to compensate for the inexperience of these officers by reserving some of the leadership positions for enlisted men in veteran regiments whose conduct in combat merited them promotion to commissioned rank.¹⁰ The best example of one of these "regulars" brought in to whip the rest of the regiment into shape was Edward Bloodgood of Milwaukee. The son of a West Point graduate, Bloodgood

had been active in the state's militia during the 1850s. When war broke out, he volunteered in the First Wisconsin Infantry and saw action at the battle of Falling Waters in July 1861. He quickly rose from sergeant major to captain in the First Wisconsin before being appointed lieutenant colonel of the Twenty-second. As the regiment's second-in-command, Bloodgood had the combat history to compensate for Utley's lack of direct experience.¹¹ This arrangement may have been sound in theory, but it would prove highly volatile when the unit first went into combat in March 1863.

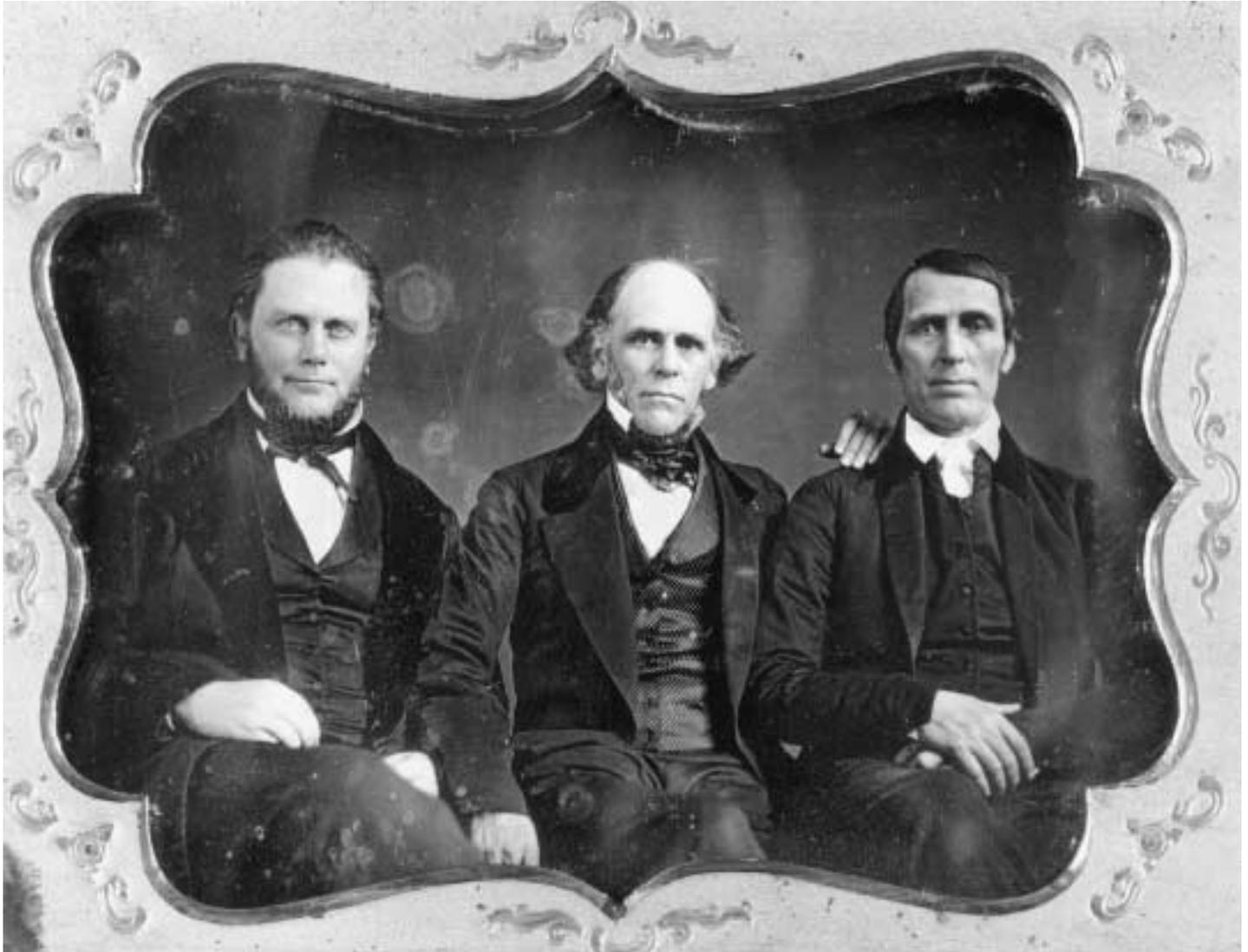
Only two weeks after being mustered into service, the Twenty-second Wisconsin was rushed south by train to Cincinnati to help counter a Confederate invasion of Kentucky. Hoping to rally the Kentuckians to its cause, the Confederacy had invaded the Bluegrass State in the summer of 1862, provoking a massive Union counteroffensive. Stuck in the middle were the white citizens of Kentucky—eager to appear loyal to the Union and yet protective of their slave system—and the slaves themselves, who often viewed the Union soldiers as liberators.

Into this maelstrom marched the Twenty-second Wisconsin Infantry. Although it would not engage Confederate forces until the following spring, the regiment became embroiled in a battle of wills with military and civil authorities over the issue of fugitive slaves soon after its arrival on Kentucky soil. It is unclear just when slaves first found refuge with the regiment; it may have been during its two-week stay near Covington, just south of Cincinnati. Unionist masters had lent some of their slaves to the army to help build fortifications, and the *Louisville Journal* complained that some of the new regiments retained the slaves after the entrenchments were finished. The Twenty-second Wisconsin began marching



WHS Archives, PH 702.43, WHI(X3)18312

Edward Bloodgood, lieutenant colonel and second in command of the Abolition Regiment. The young officer's combat record was meant to balance his commander's lack of battle experience, but once the Wisconsin troops entered warfare, the relationship between the two leaders was anything but balanced.



WHS Archives, PH 4195.341, WHI(X3)32044

From left: E. Harwood, Dr. William H. Brisbane, and Levi Coffin. Coffin, a well-known abolitionist in Cincinnati, assisted the female fugitive brought to him by members of the Twenty-second, helping her reach Wisconsin.

south from Covington in early October, and by the time it camped near Williamstown on the fifteenth of that month, several fugitives had sought refuge within its ranks.¹²

Brigadier General Quincy Gillmore, a West Pointer who commanded the 1st Division of the Army of Kentucky, issued an order that all such “contraband” should be left behind when his troops moved out the next morning.¹³ Not only did the Twenty-second fail to do so, it picked up three more fugitives before departing on the sixteenth. These slaves belonged to a farmer named Hogan, on whose property the regiment had been camped. As Company B prepared to march, one of the slaves, a seventeen-year-old named George, sought refuge in the ranks, where he was quickly taken in and disguised as a soldier. While Hogan searched for George in the barn, two

more of his slaves, men named Abe and Johnnie, found similar protection among the company. As the Twenty-second marched off the farm toward Williamstown, the regimental adjutant, Major E. D. Murray, struck up a conversation with the farmer to distract him from noticing his passing slaves.¹⁴

The three fugitives successfully evaded their master, but it was not difficult for Hogan to figure out what had happened. He complained to General Gillmore, who sent a terse letter to Utley ordering that George, Abe, and Johnnie be immediately dispatched to his headquarters.¹⁵ Gillmore’s letter also demanded the return of a fourth slave, Dick, the property of a different master who had tried to physically remove a slave from the regiment the day before. An eyewitness to this incident said the slaveholder “was glad to get away without the

blackman; as the boys came very near nabbing him and confiscating his horse.”¹⁶ In a brief note to General Gillmore, Colonel Utley refused to comply with the order, stating that he did not recognize the general’s authority in the matter. Back home, Wisconsin newspapers printed Utley’s reply with obvious delight.¹⁷

In refusing to recognize the authority of the divisional commander, Utley took legal refuge in an Article of War passed by Congress the previous March, forbidding the use of military personnel for returning fugitive slaves to their owners.¹⁸ Far from being a reckless act of courage, Utley’s recalcitrance appears to have been the calculated move of an experienced politician, one who had no qualms about exploiting the ambiguity surrounding policy in the border states in order to satisfy his own abolitionist convictions. Because the Article of War did not distinguish fugitives owned by Unionists from those belonging to rebels, Utley could resist releasing Hogan’s slaves through a strict interpretation of the statute.

Incensed at Utley’s refusal, General Gillmore confronted the colonel directly on the matter and threatened to arrest him if he did not comply. Utley reportedly warned Gillmore that he would have to arrest every commissioned officer in the regiment; whether this was a bluff is not certain, but Captain Bintliff of Company G commended his colonel strongly for taking such a stand.¹⁹ A soldier who also served as correspondent to the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* claimed the rest of the regiment echoed Utley’s defiance by giving their commander three “hearty Wisconsin cheers” when he returned from his interview with the



WHS Archives, File 1863, July 12

Above: Soldier Edward H. Pullan made this pencil sketch of a comrade from the Abolition Regiment, allowing future generations a glimpse of the faces of a long-ago war.

Below: Near Brentwood, Tennessee, the soldiers of the Twenty-second Wisconsin found themselves quickly defeated by Nathan Bedford Forrest. The Confederate general went on to become a founder of the Ku Klux Klan after the war. The fate of the fugitive slaves he captured that day is not recorded in any papers of the men of the Twenty-second.



WHS Archives, PH 6050

party of prominent citizens led by Kentucky Governor James Robinson came out to review the regiment, they informed Colonel Utley that all slaves would be forcibly removed as the unit entered Georgetown en route to its next destination.

general.²⁰ Gillmore did not follow through on his threat to arrest Utley, nor did he take any other direct action against the colonel. Instead, it appears he took indirect action against the regiment by isolating it from the rest of his command. When the brigade departed Williamstown for Georgetown early on the morning of October 20, 1862, the Twenty-second remained behind for an extra day, and rumors circulated that Gillmore wanted to transfer the balking regiment to another unit.²¹ It is clear Utley’s men were gaining a reputation within the army. The nickname “Abolition Regiment” seems to have been coined around this time. Benjamin Franklin Wright of Bloomfield, a private in Company G, went so far as to close a letter to his sister with the words: “from the bloody abolishment [sic] 22 so here called.”²²

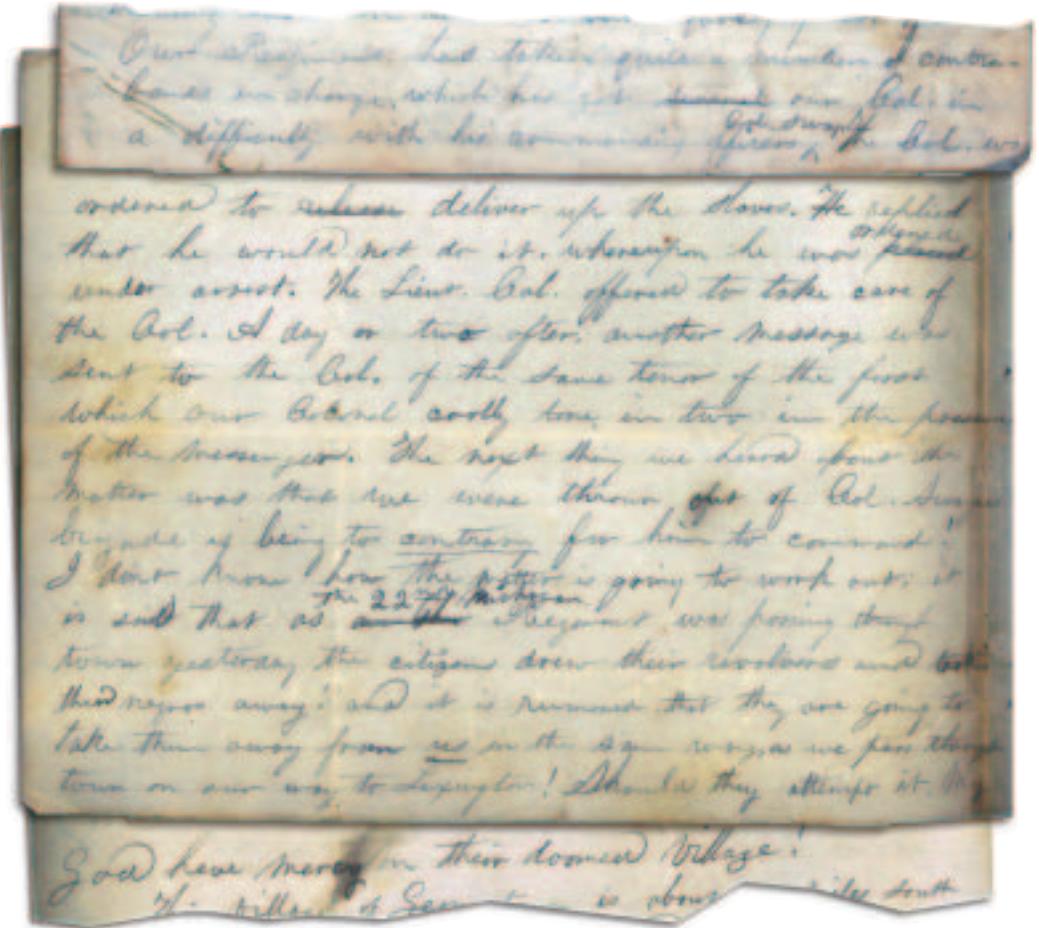
Slave-catchers hovered about the regiment as it established a new camp near

Georgetown on October 21. Several men in Company G drove off a “ruffian” trying to steal a slave from the ranks. A wagoner named Bill Needles and Private Palmer Sherman used their bayonets to deter a similar theft from Company I.²³ Despite camping near Georgetown for only two nights, the regiment managed to come into conflict with the local citizenry. Some of the townspeople threatened a soldier from Company D, warning him they would shoot any man from the Twenty-second Wisconsin who ventured into the town.²⁴ When a

Utley promptly responded by threatening to burn the town. “May God have mercy on their doomed village!” wrote a private from Company C as he contemplated the potential clash.²⁵

The rest of the brigade had already departed for Lexington, leaving the Twenty-second Wisconsin to escort the baggage train. A rumor circulated that General Gillmore had purposely left the Twenty-second behind so that local wrath would fall where it was due.²⁶ The Twenty-second’s departure proved anticlimactic: no violent confrontation took place, perhaps because Utley ordered his thousand men to march through Georgetown at three in the morning with muskets loaded and bayonets fixed.²⁷ After joining the main body of the Army of Kentucky near Lexington, the regiment settled into camp three miles north of the city. Rumor of Gillmore’s desire to rid himself of the Wisconsin regiment may have been true, because the Twenty-second was transferred to the 3rd Division soon after its arrival.

Having weathered the wrath of both Gillmore and the citizens of Georgetown, the regiment continued in its policy of harboring fugitive slaves. Sometime during the first week of November, the eighteen-year-old slave woman sought refuge with the regiment. She had recently been sold for the hefty sum of \$1,700, and she claimed that her new owner intended to employ her as a prostitute in Lexington. She found temporary safety in the camp until Colonel Utley decided to send her to Cincinnati, where he hoped the celebrated abolitionist Levi Coffin might provide her safe passage northward. Quartermaster Jesse Berch and Private Frank Rockwell of Company C volunteered to escort her to Cincinnati. They departed camp in a sutler’s wagon in the middle of the night with the woman hiding in the back, disguised as a soldier. After driving all night and into the following day, the trio reached Coffin’s home and the men placed the runaway slave in his care. The two soldiers remained for a couple of days to recover



WHS Archives, La Crosse Mss J Box 1

Soldiers’ letters, like this one from Benjamin F. Heuston to his wife, described the conflicts between the men of the Twenty-second Wisconsin and Kentucky citizens.

from their journey and to help make arrangements for the woman’s passage farther north. While in Cincinnati the trio visited a daguerreotype gallery and posed for the camera—the young black woman seated and the two soldiers standing behind her, brandishing their pistols. Quartermaster Berch telegraphed friends in Racine, who agreed to meet the woman at the railroad depot and provide her with lodgings in the city. With the woman safely on the train, the two men returned to the regiment amidst “loud cheering” and a “hearty welcome.”²⁸

With new controversies looming, the regiment journeyed south toward Nicholasville in Jessamine County. Though he had used his bayonet to drive off a slave-catcher during the march to Georgetown, Private Palmer Sherman of Rock County later allowed his avarice to get the best of him. Succumbing to the promise of money from two slave-catchers, Sherman convinced Hogan’s slave George to join him in a hunt for wild turkeys. As they left the safety of the camp, the slave-catchers ambushed George and took him to the town

jail. When Colonel Utley heard of Sherman's treachery, he dispatched a guard of men to rescue George.²⁹ With the slave returned safely to the camp, a strange ritual took place, recorded in a letter to the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*:

*A large ring was formed and both the betrayer and the betrayed were ordered in the centre. After a most withering rebuke from the Col. to Sherman, a vote of the regiment was taken, which was entitled to the respect of the regiment, the slave or Sherman? The result was that the slave was unanimously ahead.*³⁰

When the *Racine Weekly Journal* reported the incident, it mistakenly believed that the perpetrator was a Racine native. Clearly ashamed that their community could produce such a scoundrel, the editors predicted that the sneaking coward would be unable to show his face in the city for some time.³¹

Less than a month after arriving near Nicholasville, the regiment received a visit from the sheriff of Jessamine County armed with an arrest warrant for Colonel Utley. This particular incident's origins were in the regiment's recent stay near Lexington. The day after the troops' arrival there, a fugitive slave named Adam had wandered into the picket line. Often referred to in newspaper accounts as the "dwarf negro" because of his small stature, Adam had been the property of a Lexington man who hired him out to another master for fifty dollars. Considering himself cheated because of the slave's stature, the master abused Adam terribly, forcing him to seek the protection of his owner. When the latter ignored his pleas for help, Adam fled into the woods around Lexington. Company A of the Twenty-second Wisconsin took the fugitive under its protection, and he quickly became a valued member of the unit, serving as a waiter for Orderly Frank Lawrence of Racine.³² The owner traced Adam to the regiment and confronted

Colonel Utley on the matter shortly before the unit marched to Nicholasville.

Adam's owner was no ordinary farmer. He was none other than George Robertson, chief justice of the Kentucky Supreme Court, a supposedly staunch Union man and reputedly an acquaintance of President Lincoln. Robertson

demanded Adam's surrender. Colonel Utley told the judge he would search the camp for the slave, and if Adam was willing to return to Robertson, he would be remanded to his custody. Adam, of course, preferred freedom, and once he had told the colonel the details of his servitude, Utley vowed never to release him. He rebuked Robertson in strong words when the judge returned for the slave later that day. A crowd of soldiers gathered to hear the fiery exchange and raised a cheer as Justice Robertson stormed out of the camp. One of the numerous eyewitnesses wrote a detailed account of the incident for the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, and John Chambers of Compa-



Ohio Historical Society

Many fugitive male slaves—including several of those who traveled with the Twenty-second Wisconsin—remained with the regiments that delivered to them their freedom, taking on roles like cook and steward.

ny K enclosed a copy of it in a letter to his sister, urging her to "pass it around to any one that wants to know what the 22 Regiments [*sic*] Sentiments are in regard to slavery."³³

Robertson went straight to Colonel John Coburn, the brigade commander, who summoned Utley to appear before them. The judge renewed his demand for the slave, and again Utley rebuked him. Coburn followed a strict interpretation of the Article of War and refused to intervene in the matter. He did not offer the services of any military personnel for Adam's retrieval, nor did he attempt to arrest Colonel Utley.³⁴ Coburn's motive is unclear, but it is likely he shared Utley's disdain for the Kentucky slaveholders. Like Utley, Coburn had joined the antislavery Republican Party before the war; later he would serve four terms as a Republican congressman from Ohio.³⁵ Turning to legal channels for satisfaction, Robertson filed his complaint at the courthouse in

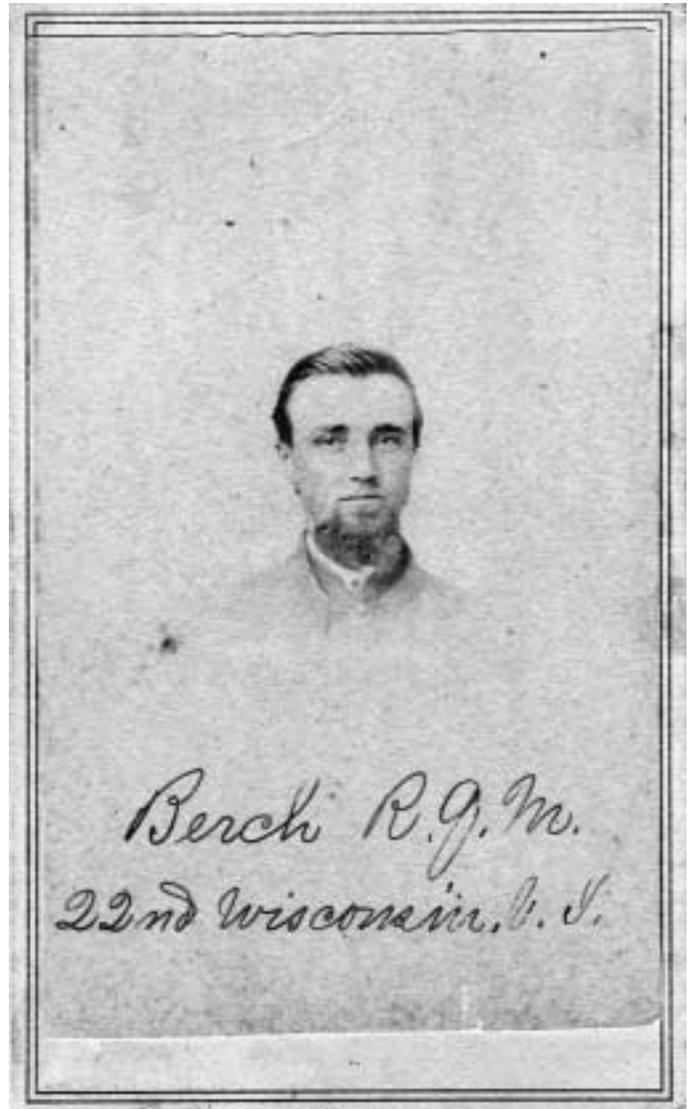


Ohio Historical Society

Like other "contraband," this group of army teamsters, pictured here in Cobb Hill, Virginia, chose to serve the units that freed them rather than flee north.

Nicholasville. The sheriff of Jessamine County soon received both a writ of replevin for Adam and an arrest warrant for Utley.³⁶ When this news reached the Twenty-second Wisconsin, the regimental captains explained the situation to their individual companies and informed the men that only the sheriff would be allowed to speak with Utley. Any posse accompanying the sheriff would be refused entrance to the camp.³⁷ One Racine soldier wrote home that every man in Company A would have to be killed before Adam could be taken.³⁸ Lacking the support of military authorities, the sheriff hesitated. According to a correspondent in Company C, he did not attempt to enter the camp until the regiment's final day in Nicholasville. Then, rather than identifying himself to the picket, he came disguised as a Union soldier with dispatches for the colonel. When brought before Utley, the sheriff tried to serve his papers. Not surprisingly, Utley refused to cooperate, and the sheriff departed camp empty-handed, realizing, in the words of the Wisconsin soldier, that "the regiment will stand by [Colonel Utley] to the last man."³⁹

Perhaps anticipating frustration through the local courts, Justice Robertson next appealed directly to President Lincoln. Faced with an embarrassing political situation, Lincoln sought a compromise by offering the judge five hundred dollars for the slave. Robertson rejected the president's offer and later sued Utley in federal court for the full value of the slave plus court costs. Utley's lawyers filed a series of measures designed to delay the case; so successful were they that Robertson was not granted a judgment until 1871. Not until 1873, more than a decade after the slave Adam became a



Marc and Beth Storch Collection

It was Sergeant Jesse Berch who telegraphed friends in Racine, requesting assistance for the fugitive woman whom the Abolition Regiment had taken under its protection.

fugitive, was the matter finally settled. At that time the U.S. House of Representatives appropriated funds in the amount of \$934.46 to satisfy Robertson's judgment.⁴⁰

With Adam safely secured, the Twenty-second Wisconsin marched south to Danville, Kentucky. In late January 1863 the regiment received orders to depart for Louisville where it was to embark with the rest of the 3rd Division on steamers for a river journey to Nashville. In a letter to his brother, John Chambers described a disturbing encounter with a slaveholder on the road to Louisville. Company K had two fugitives in its midst at the time, one of them named Marshal. Marshal's owner stood by the side of the road as the troops passed.

"Marshal, you are bound to go, are you?" the master called out. The slave responded, "Yes, Massa," and contin-



WHS Archives, File 1863, July 12

Edward H. Pullan's sketch of camp life in July 1864, long after the Abolition Regiment's initial sojourn in Kentucky. By this time the men of the Twenty-second had distinguished themselves in battle and were within two miles of Atlanta.

ued past the man. The owner called out a second time, stating how he hoped to hear soon of Marshal's death. Private Chambers observed afterward, "We have plenty of boys that would have been glad to put a Ball through [the owner's] head if they dared."⁴¹

As the regiment camped outside Louisville on January 30, the words from Marshal's owner may have taken on an eerily prophetic quality. Slave-hunters swarmed throughout the city, bent on making one last effort to remove contraband from the departing regiments. Rumors circulated that a Negro had been killed in a fracas the day before and that the Twenty-second Wisconsin was being singled out for special attention.⁴² Hoping to avoid any confrontations, General

Gordon Granger, commander of the Army of Kentucky, ordered all "contraband" left behind before embarkation. Once again disobeying a direct order from his superiors, Colonel Utley did not compel the slaves to remain in Kentucky; however, he did offer five dollars to any slave who willingly chose to leave the regiment.⁴³ Utley intended this offer to show that he was not forcing any of the African American men to stay.

The Twenty-second did not march to the docks of Louisville until the afternoon of Sunday, February 2. The rest of the regiments in the brigade had departed the day before, leaving two steamers ready to receive the ten Wisconsin companies.⁴⁴ Caleb Pillsbury, the Twenty-second's Methodist

chaplain and one of Colonel Utley's most vocal supporters, walked some distance ahead of the regiment and engaged in conversation with one of the onlookers crowding the side of the street. The man told Pillsbury that slaves had been pulled from the ranks of every other passing regiment.⁴⁵ It appeared as though the Twenty-second Wisconsin would face the same treatment. A Walworth County man wrote home, "Slaveholders whose faces we recognized as living along the line of our former marches from Danville and away back to Georgetown, were rushing along, pointing out the negroes to the bullies who were to do the jerking."⁴⁶ Anticipating intervention by these "bullies," Utley had ordered his men to march with their bayonets fixed.

But even this precaution did not deter one fellow from attempting to snatch a slave from the Wisconsin ranks. The best account of the incident appears in the journal of Charles Dickinson of Company E. Justice Robertson's slave Adam was marching between Companies H and E when a man rushed out of the crowd and grabbed hold of him. One of the soldiers in Company H had given Adam a pistol earlier in the day. The slave now stuck the muzzle of the weapon in his assailant's face and pulled the trigger. It misfired. At that moment four men from the front rank of Company E rushed the attacker and drove him off the street with their bayonets.⁴⁷ Colonel Coburn, the brigade commander, appeared alongside the regiment at this point and ordered the men to load their muskets. He reportedly taunted one of the nearby masters, daring him to step forward and retrieve his slave.⁴⁸ The Twenty-second continued to the docks unmolested, and the remaining slaves boarded the steamers with the troops. The captain of the vessel *Commercial* initially refused to get up steam unless Utley removed the slaves from his ship, but he soon relented after the colonel threatened to arrest him and replace him with one of his own men.⁴⁹

So ended the Twenty-second Wisconsin's sojourn in Ken-



WHS Archives, Name File, WHi(X3)22117

James Bintliff of Monroe served with the Twenty-second Wisconsin and supported Colonel Utley's strong abolitionist views.

tucky. Although it would be satisfying to tell how the slaves who remained with the regiment went on to lead rich lives as freedmen, their future proved tragic. On March 25, 1863, a month after the regiment arrived in Tennessee, 378 of its men took part in a brigade-sized reconnaissance of a large rebel force in the hills near Thompson's Station. Outnumbered almost six to one, the Union troops walked into what one wounded survivor called "a perfect trap."⁵⁰ The five-hour

battle resulted in the capture of many of the Union soldiers involved, including Colonel Utley and more than 160 of the Wisconsin troops.⁵¹ Lieutenant Colonel Bloodgood escaped capture with the remainder of the men and assumed command of the regiment. Three weeks later a large force of rebel cavalry commanded by General Nathan Bedford Forrest swept down upon the regiment at its encampment near Brentwood, Tennessee. Facing overwhelming numbers, Lieutenant Colonel Bloodgood surrendered the remaining five hundred men. According to Harvey Reid of Company A, the remaining slaves—Adam among them—were removed from the camp.⁵² With that, they disappear from the record, their fate in Confederate hands unknown.

By June 1863 the entire regiment had been paroled—that is, they were exchanged for a like number of Confederate prisoners of war—and reformed near St. Louis. But clearly the twin disasters the Twenty-second Wisconsin had suffered that spring had eroded the regiment’s morale. A terrible feud broke out between Colonel Utley and Lieutenant Colonel Bloodgood over their respective conduct at Thompson’s Station. Utley accused Bloodgood of cowardice under fire and of cravenly abandoning the colonel and his men to certain capture and brought charges against him. But what began as a campaign against Bloodgood turned into a war against the regiment’s other officers. The same stubborn defiance Utley had shown the slaveholders he now directed toward his own subordinates. After twenty-three of the twenty-seven line officers accused Utley of incompetence and petitioned for his resignation, the colonel utilized all of his political skills to purge them from the regiment. Bloodgood was made the scapegoat for Thompson’s Station and dismissed from service in November 1863. The enlisted ranks weighed in on the side of Bloodgood; over two-thirds of them

signed a testimonial praising his courage and conduct. With the help of the other officers, Bloodgood successfully campaigned for reinstatement in December 1863 and returned to the regiment. He and Colonel Utley resumed their very tense and unhappy relationship. Utley succeeded in forcing the resignation of several other officers, but it appears he lost the respect and support of most of his men. A year after the regiment re-formed, Utley tendered his own resignation in July 1864. He cited failing health, exacerbated perhaps by his wife’s death in Wisconsin that spring; a rumor circulated through the ranks suggesting that Utley had resigned to avoid a court-martial for his own incompetency under fire.⁵³

The feud between Utley and Bloodgood was a complicated affair, and the surviving historical record makes it difficult to determine who was in the right. Each undoubtedly went to his own grave believing the other had injured him. Other senior officers involved in the debacle at Thompson’s Station supported Utley’s view of Bloodgood, although they may have been trying to shift scrutiny away from their own conduct.⁵⁴ Bloodgood also received much criticism from his superiors for



WHS Archives, PH 12:46

Brigadier General Quincy Gillmore, commander of the 1st Division of the Army of Kentucky, had the unenviable task of dealing with those Kentucky civilians who bitterly complained about the Twenty-second Wisconsin.

his rapid surrender at Brentwood.⁵⁵ Eyewitnesses to the event, however, believed he did the right thing, with his men lacking proper entrenchments and the Confederate artillery poised to slaughter them.⁵⁶ Utley injured his case in the court of public opinion by sending a nasty, rambling diatribe against Bloodgood to the editor of the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*. Among his many inflammatory remarks, Utley described Bloodgood as the spoiled child of a fond mother who was useful for only three things: “Serenades, Dress Parades, and Pay Days.”⁵⁷

If Bloodgood seems to emerge on top, however, it may be attributed to the surviving testimony of the regiment’s private soldiers. Harvey Reid of Company A, for example, contrast-

ed the cool and courageous figure of Bloodgood mounted on his horse at Thompson's Station amidst enemy fire with the unflattering image of Utley walking into the same battle, his insignia purposely concealed beneath a soiled overcoat.⁵⁸ When Utley forced the resignation of Captain Gage Burgess of Company E in March 1864, Private Charles Dickinson wrote in his journal how the boys in the company would have preferred that the colonel resign.⁵⁹ In a later entry he recounted the pitiful moment when Utley assembled the regiment in order to state his case against Bloodgood. Within ten minutes, Dickinson reported, the men had drifted back to their tents.⁶⁰

Regardless of later enmity felt toward William L. Utley, it is clear that the colonel enjoyed widespread support among his men during the Twenty-second's tenure as the Abolition Regiment in Kentucky.

There is no evidence that his fall from grace stemmed from resentment over his confrontations with the slaveholding enemy. Indeed, the colonel's uncompromising policy in Kentucky would have been difficult to maintain without the support of his troops. More was at work here, however, than the simple following of orders. Why the soldiers so enthusiastically



WHS Archives, Name File, WHI(X3)18311

Private Harvey Reid's letters home to his sisters provide more primary information about the Twenty-second Wisconsin than any other source. Reid is pictured here in 1904, more than fifty years after his time in Kentucky.

ly disrupted the slavery they found in Kentucky is difficult to answer, because Union soldiers supported abolitionism for a variety of reasons. Among the troops of the Twenty-second Wisconsin was a group of men who opposed slavery on moral grounds, those whom Harvey Reid called the "rabid abolitionists."⁶¹ They tended to regard slavery as sinful and often held a more enlightened view of human rights. These sentiments had always enjoyed their strongest support in southeastern and southcentral Wisconsin, an area populated by transplanted New Englanders.⁶² The four counties that filled the regiment had shown support for black rights in 1857 by voting in favor of a referendum extending suffrage to free blacks, a measure defeated statewide.⁶³

For other men in the regiment—like Colonel Utley—preservation of the Union, not black rights, seems to have motivated

them to attack slavery. According to this view, the peculiar institution needed to die so that the Union could live. These men viewed the Kentuckians as closet secessionists and therefore had no qualms about harboring fugitives.⁶⁴ Still others might have joined the attack on slavery in the hope that emancipated slaves would provide manpower for the Union Army. Although Presi-

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From tiny Covington near Cincinnati, as far south as Danville, and then west to Louisville, the Twenty-second Wisconsin made its way through the Bluegrass State, creating problems for the Union strategically but offering freedom for the men and women who sought protection.

dent Lincoln had not yet approved the use of black soldiers in the fall of 1862, the idea had been favorably discussed at local war meetings in southeastern Wisconsin at the time of the Twenty-second Regiment's formation.⁶⁵

Many soldiers may have had difficulty articulating their reasons for joining the Union war effort. In this regard, the unit's origin in a strongly abolitionist region of Wisconsin rendered its members particularly susceptible to a crusade

against slavery. After all, they were young men, somewhat innocent perhaps, and certainly malleable. Inspired by Colonel Utley's outspoken opposition to the slaveholders and infused with the adventure of soldiering, the troops' inclination toward abolitionism hardened into resolve. A convergence of forces seems to have generated a powerful group mentality among the men, one not found to the same degree in most other Union formations. Their collective identity as the "Abolition Regiment" may be attributed to Utley's charismatic leadership working upon men who were already predisposed to oppose slavery.

During their stay in Kentucky, on the fringes of the war, they had time to witness firsthand the horrors of chattel slavery and to play a role in thwarting the slave-catchers who were continually lurking around their camps. They had not yet confronted the grim, terrible realities of close combat, which would soon give them quite another perspective on the war. They may have viewed Colonel Utley in a different light when rebel fire began thinning their ranks at Thompson's Station. The chaos and bloodshed of combat, to say nothing of their capture

and imprisonment, probably broke the spell that had united the regiment in its common abolitionist identity. From that moment, personal survival and collective victory in battle—not freedom and emancipation for runaway slaves—became the touchstone of the regiment's actions.

During the final year of the war, the Twenty-second Wisconsin enjoyed many moments of collective victory in battle. Transferred to General Joe Hooker's Twentieth Corps in the

Page No. 1

SCHEDULE 2—Slave Inhabitants in in the County of *Grant* State

of Kentucky, enumerated by me, on the *28* day of *October*, 1860. Am't Marshal

NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS	Number of Slaves	DESCRIPTION				Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic	Total	NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS	Number of Slaves	DESCRIPTION				Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic	Total
		Male	Female	Color	Age					Male	Female	Color	Age		
	1	25	M	B					1	7	F	B			
	1	20	F	B					1	7	F	M			
	1	17	F	B					1	10	M	B			
	1	14	M	B					1	2	F	B			
	1	12	F	B					1	10	M	M			
	1	2	F	M				<i>1 Cornwell S. Keaton</i>	1	14	F	B			
<i>Therodora Lucas</i>	1	27	F	B					1	22	M	B			
	1	4	F	M					1	21	M	B			
	1	13	F	M				<i>Walter S. Keaton</i>	1	21	F	B			
	1	18	F	B				<i>Walter S. Keaton</i>	1	2	M	B			
	1	4	F	M					1	9	M	B			
	1	2	M	B					1	7	F	B			
<i>Conston J. Hogan</i>	1	55	F	B				<i>Alfred Kendall</i>	1	24	M	B			
	1	35	M	B					1	26	F	B			
	1	31	F	B					1	30	F	B			
	1	25	M	B					1	25	F	B			
	1	21	F	M					1	23	M	B			
	1	22	F	B					1	22	M	B			
	1	17	M	B					1	22	M	B			
	1	14	M	B					1	14	M	B			
	1	14	F	B					1	15	F	B			
	1	12	M	B					1	14	F	B			

1860 Census, Grant County, Kentucky Slave Schedules, p. 8

The slave schedule from Grant County, Kentucky, lists the human assets of a man named Hogan, and the male slaves listed here by color—B for black or M or mulatto—and age, never by name, are likely the young men who escaped only two years later.

spring of 1864, the regiment distinguished itself during General Sherman's famous March to the Sea and his drive through the Carolinas. In its first battle near Resaca, Georgia, on June 15, 1864, the Twenty-second breached the Confederate entrenchments, capturing a four-gun battery that had been blasting the Union infantry with grapeshot and canister. Four Wisconsin corporals who carried the regiment's colors were wounded in the charge, and the regiment suffered seventy-three casualties. Colonel Utley tendered his resignation soon after this engagement, and Lieutenant Colonel Bloodgood assumed command of the regiment, leading it to distinction at other Georgia battlefields, including Kennesaw

Mountain and Peach Tree Creek. The men of the Twenty-second Wisconsin were among the first Union soldiers to enter Atlanta.⁶⁶

When Confederate General Joe Johnston finally sought peace terms from General Sherman on April 17, 1865, the Twenty-second Wisconsin was camped near Raleigh, North Carolina. The regiment marched to Washington, D.C., in May and paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue in the grand review of Sherman's army before being mustered out of service and sent back to Wisconsin. Like all veterans, the men returned to civilian life changed by their experiences in the long and brutal war. The outspoken William Utley became a

newspaper editor in Racine, served in minor political offices, and raised horses. Edward Bloodgood returned to Milwaukee and became active in the Grand Army of the Republic, a national organization that lobbied on behalf of Civil War veterans and staged reunions for survivors well into the twentieth century. In the decades following the conflict, veterans from the Twenty-second Wisconsin gathered at these events and reminisced about their experiences in the war. They had much to be proud of: a gallant military record under General Sherman and a reputation as the Abolition Regiment defending fugitive slaves in Kentucky. It is impossible to say that their exploits on the battlefield were any more noble than the men's uncompromising stand against the slaveholders of Kentucky. ❧



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¹ Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 606.

² For a detailed profile of runaway slaves, see John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 209–233.

³ The best overall account of the Union Army's interaction with slavery in Kentucky appears in Victor B. Howard, *Black Liberation in Kentucky: Emancipation and Freedom, 1862–1884* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 12–28.

⁴ Charles E. Estabrook, ed., *Annual Reports of the Adjutant General of the State of Wisconsin for the Years 1860, 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864* (Madison: Adjutant General's Office, 1912), 183–184, 196 (hereinafter cited as *Annual Reports*); Governor Salomon, "Annual Message 1863" in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Civil War Messages and Proclamations of Wisconsin War Governors* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Commission, 1912), 158–159.

⁵ *Janesville Daily Gazette*, July 18, 1862; *Racine Weekly Journal*, July 15, 1862.

⁶ "Life of Col. William Laurence Utley," author unknown, in File 820—Utley at the Racine County Historical Society, 1–2.

⁷ *Racine Daily Journal*, March 5, 1887, March 7, 1887; *Racine Advocate*, March 12, 1887.

⁸ Excerpt from *U.S. Biographical Dictionary, Wisconsin, 1877*, 98, in File 820—Utley at the Racine County Historical Society, 1–2.

⁹ Reid to parents, August 11, 1862, in Box 1 of the Harvey Reid Papers at the UW–Parkside Area Research Center, Wisconsin Historical Society.

¹⁰ *Annual Reports*, 102–103.

¹¹ Frank L. Byrne, ed., *The View from Headquarters: Civil War Letters of Harvey Reid* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1965) (hereinafter cited as *View from Headquarters*), xii–xiii.

¹² *Louisville Journal*, October 7, 1862, reprinted in *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, October 9, 1862; Letter of C., October 17, 1862, in *Monroe Sentinel*, November 5, 1862.

¹³ Letter of Captain James Bintliff, October 20, 1862, in *Monroe Sentinel*, October 29, 1862.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Harvey Reid to sisters, October 16, 1862, in *View from Headquarters*, 9–10.

¹⁵ Gilmore to Utley, October 18, 1862, in *Monroe Sentinel*, October 29, 1862.

¹⁶ Letter of C., October 17, 1862, in *Monroe Sentinel*, November 5, 1862. For another mention of the same event, see H. Stewart to parents, October 22, 1862, in *Racine Weekly Journal*, November 5, 1862.

¹⁷ *Monroe Sentinel*, October 29, 1862; *Beloit Journal and Courier*, November 13, 1862.

¹⁸ *Statutes at Large*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, 354.

¹⁹ Letter of Captain James Bintliff, October 20, 1862, in *Monroe Sentinel*, October 29, 1862.

²⁰ Letter of W.H.M., October 28, 1862, in *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, November 4, 1862.

²¹ Harvey Reid to sisters, October 28, 1862, in *View from Headquarters*, 10.

²² Wright to Electra, October 23, 1862, in the Benjamin Franklin Wright Papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

²³ Letter of Captain James Bintliff, October 22, 1862, in *Monroe Sentinel*, November 5, 1862; Private letter, author unknown, October 23, 1862, in *Beloit Journal and Courier*, October 30, 1862.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Benjamin Heuston to wife, October 23, 1862, in the Benjamin Franklin Heuston Papers at the UW–La Crosse Area Research Center, Wisconsin Historical Society.

²⁶ Letter of B.S.H., November 14, 1862, in *Beloit Journal and Courier*, December 4, 1862.

²⁷ Reverend G. S. Bradley, *The Star Corps: Or, Notes of an Army Chaplain During Sherman's Famous "March to the Sea"* (Milwaukee: Jermain & Brightman, 1865), 67; William H. McIntosh, "Annals of the 22nd Wisconsin," an unpublished narrative at the Wisconsin Historical Society, 8.

²⁸ Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 606–609.

²⁹ McIntosh, "Annals of the 22nd Wisconsin," 11; Harvey Reid to brothers and sisters, November 16, 1862, in *View from Headquarters*, 16; Letter of B.S.H., November 19, 1862, in *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, November 26, 1862.

³⁰ Letter of B.S.H., November 19, 1862, in *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, November 26, 1862.

³¹ *Racine Weekly Journal*, November 26, 1862.

³² Harvey Reid to sisters, November 11, 1862, in *View from Headquarters*, 14.

³³ Chambers to sister, December 8, 1862, in the Letters of John A. Chambers on microfilm at the Wisconsin Historical Society. For accounts of Utley's confrontation with Robertson, see *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, November 22, 1862, and Harvey Reid to sisters, November 11, 1862, in *View from Headquarters*, 15.

³⁴ Bradley, *Star Corps*, 74.

³⁵ David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 454.

³⁶ Letter of Captain James Bintliff, November 16, 1862, in *Monroe Sentinel*, November 26, 1862.

³⁷ McIntosh, "Annals of the 22nd Wisconsin," 11.

³⁸ Letter of F., December 5, 1862, in *Racine Weekly Journal*, December 17, 1862.

³⁹ "Union" to Editors, December 10, 1862, in *Elkhorn Independent*, December 19, 1862.

⁴⁰ William H. Townsend, *Lincoln and the Bluegrass: Slavery and Civil War in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1955), 301–302. See also Eugene W. Leach, "More Light on Colonel Utley's Contest with Judge Robertson," in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 3:251–253 (1919–1920).

⁴¹ Chambers to brother, February 1, 1863, in the Letters of John A. Chambers on microfilm at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁴² Letter of Captain James Bintliff, February 6, 1863, in *Monroe Sentinel*, February 16, 1863.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Letter to Editor, author unknown, February 7, 1863, in *Beloit Journal and Courier*, February 18, 1863.

⁴⁵ Letter of Pillsbury, February 2, 1863, in *Racine Weekly Advocate*, February 11, 1863.

⁴⁶ "Union" to Editors, February 2, 1863, in *Elkhorn Independent*, February 13, 1863.

⁴⁷ Journal of Charles H. Dickinson at the Wisconsin Historical Society (hereinafter cited as Dickinson Journal), 23–24.

⁴⁸ Letter of Pillsbury, February 2, 1863, in *Racine Weekly Advocate*, February 11, 1863.

⁴⁹ Dickinson Journal, 24.

⁵⁰ John Chambers to brother, March 10, 1863, in the Letters of John A. Chambers on microfilm at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁵¹ Government Printing Office, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Vol. 23, Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Gov't. Printing Office, 1886) (hereinafter cited as *War of the Rebellion*), 84.

⁵² Letter of Harvey Reid to sisters, April 24, 1863, in *View from Headquarters*, 47.

⁵³ The Utley/Bloodgood saga can be followed in Harvey Reid's letters. See *View from Headquarters*, 76–77, 82, 87, 102, 105–106, 111–112, 115–118, 167.

⁵⁴ *War of the Rebellion*, Vol. 23, Part 1, p. 89, 95.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, Part 1, p. 176–177, 185–186.

⁵⁶ Letter of Caleb E. Pillsbury, March 17, 1863, in *Racine Weekly Advocate*, March 25, 1863; Letter of Harvey Reid to sisters, April 24, 1863, in *View from Headquarters*, 44–46.

⁵⁷ Utley to Editor, November 28, 1863, in *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, December 10, 1863.

⁵⁸ Letter of Harvey Reid to sisters, March 5, 1863, in *View from Headquarters*, 38.

⁵⁹ Dickinson Journal, 102.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶¹ Letter of Harvey Reid to sisters, November 11, 1862, in *View from Headquarters*, 15–16.

⁶² William Fletcher Thompson, ed., *The History of Wisconsin*, Vol. 1, *From Exploration to Statehood*, by Alice E. Smith (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1973), 471, 635.

⁶³ On the 1857 referendum, see Election Return Statements, Box 4, 1857–1859, at the Wisconsin Historical Society, and Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 335. The 1857 referendum statement for Rock County is missing from the secretary of state's records; however, its vote can be found in the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, November 18, 1857.

⁶⁴ Utley to D. C. Wickleffe, January 1, 1863, reprinted in *Racine Weekly Advocate*, January 28, 1863.

⁶⁵ For example see *Monroe Sentinel*, July 16, 1862.

⁶⁶ E. B. Quiner, *Military History of Wisconsin: A Record of the Civil and Military Patriotism of the State, in the War for the Union* (Chicago: Clarke & Co., 1866), 701–706.