

Captain Napoleon Monroe Bearden,

Co "E" 8th Tennessee Regiment Volunteers

Biographical Sketch

Monroe Bearden was the 2nd son of Alfred and Margaret Bearden, born February 8, 1837 in Marshall County TN. Monroe moved with his family to Fayetteville in 1839, and then to what is today Hwy 110 between Taft and Fayetteville. His father Alfred was born in S.C. and was a gunsmith and farmer.

Monroe attended Burrett College and graduated in 1857. His early war era picture has him in a Tennessee Militia uniform, although it is not known if he was in the militia prior to enlisting. In the original forming of the 8th Tennessee Regiment he was a lieutenant in Company "C", and then elected Captain on May 8, 1862 during the reorganization. At that time, Company "C" became Company "E". Captain Bearden was with the 8th during the Cheat Mountain Campaign, Port Royal S.C., and in the battles of Corinth, Perryville and Stones River.

[image: Captain Bearden in his uniform]

The 8th Tennessee was engaged in what I feel is the "hottest" part of the battle on the late morning and early afternoon of December 31st. The 68% casualty rate will attest to the fervor of their fight. Two days following the first day of battle at Stones River, word made it to his father in Fayetteville, TN that he was wounded. Alfred immediately sent word to his wife Margaret and then left for Murfreesboro with a friend.

After an arduous ride, he arrived in Murfreesboro and found his son in the Soule Female College, which was being utilized as Cheatham's Brigade hospital. At some point in the next few days, he moved his son to the residence of the mayor of Murfreesboro, Mr. J.M. Tompkins. Prior to being torn down for a new parking garage, this house was still standing and was the office of the Daily News Journal at 224 N. Walnut. Family tradition has his wife and daughter arriving in Murfreesboro shortly thereafter in a wagon loaded with supplies for a makeshift hospital for the wounded.

Regardless of the timing, a letter from Monroe's brother-in-law Brown Parkinson to his wife Culpertia has them in the Tomkins [sic] residence on January 6th. The letter has Brown Parkinson sitting up caring for Monroe while Alfred, Margaret and their daughter Delia are sleeping. This letter also has a listing of friends killed and wounded, a task which Brown said was "not worth trying to name all that was wounded because our Company was very near all wounded or killed". Interesting to note that the treatment for Monroe's wound in his right thigh was by "keeping wet cloths on it". This probably was the cause of death, not the initial wounding. Also interesting is that Brown was serving with Company "E", enlisting in November and participating in the battle. How he was allowed to stay was either due to the leniency for caring for wounded at that time, or the influence that Alfred had as a person. I tend to believe that Alfred was a man of

influence. Later in the War, he would write to then Governor Andrew Johnson to secure the release of a relative from Union prison camp.

In the book "Campaigns and Battles of the Sixteenth Regiment, Tennessee Volunteers", by Thomas A. Head, the writer states that "Captain Bearden was also slain, he and nine of his men falling by the same shot from the enemy's cannon". The actual place of the wounding is unknown, although many have placed it near the Cowan House.

Alfred Bearden would keep a diary during this time, actually a farm book containing various information about his farm's activities. His words have been used by many scholars over the years to help represent the despair felt by the families of all of those who lost their loved ones during the War. The below are excerpts from his diary used in Dr. Bob Womack's book, "Call Forth the Mighty Men".

On January 20th Alfred wrote: "Monroe much worse – I lost hope of recovery. O God, who can describe my feeling just to think of giving up my dear boy, the very one on whose manly form I expected to lean on in old age. About 11 or 12 OC PM I told my dear Boy that he was doomed to die, he said that he was not aware of it. Asked how long he had to live – I told him I did not know that death was not on him at that time – he seemed perfectly resigned to his fate. O God, this is the hardest trial of my life."

The following day he wrote: "But little change in Monroe, Dr. Hatcher visited this morning and examined his wound – Monroe remarked that we had given him out too soon – Went to work in earnest to try to save him – he seemed to be in but little pain. Monroe called for Father about 11 OC PM – being asked what he wanted He said Morphine, I gave him morphine and he went to sleep – was conchious [sic] and in but little pain – took some coffy [sic] after."

On January 22, 1863 Alfred wrote: "4 OC PM 20 mi. died in the north room of Dr. (Mr.) Tompkins [sic] residence Murfreesboro, Tennessee Captain Napoleon Monroe Bearden Capt. Of Co. E 9th Regiment Tenn. Volunteers.... Bot [sic] a Burial Case of Lewis Brown placed and sealed him up late in afternoon"

Due to weather conditions. Monroe's grave was delayed in being prepared. The actual burial was in a below ground brick burial vault. On the 12th day of March, Alfred wrote: "about 2 OC PM deposited the case containing the remains of my dear son, N.M. Bearden in a vault prepared for its reception in my garden. A large crowd of our friends and neighbors being present. He was in a wonderful state of preservation taking into consideration the length of time since his death – O how natural that manly Brave and pleasant features did look to an almost heart broken Parent. Brothers and sisters the recollections of the day are burned in my feelings."

In the summer of 1863, Alfred stopped his wagon near the spot where his son had fallen during the battle. He wrote: "Examined part of the Battle ground where Monroe fell. Felt cast down and melancholy. Of but this is a sad place for me, still I like to linger near it." Alfred was on his way to sell cotton to the North.

Alfred Bearden was a gunsmith and farmer by trade. He owned significant acreage in the area and his hand made long rifles are still valued by collectors today. At the beginning of the War, Alfred was involved in the procurement of arms from the general population and was paid by the CSA for 14 days work inspecting and shipping arms to and from Nashville. He was known in the community as Colonel Bearden, undoubtedly attributed to his significant involvement and early support of the South's fight for Independence.

I personally feel that by War's end, he had changed. I guess War has that impact on everyone. During the War, he would lose one of his sons, two sons-in-law and a daughter. His oldest son, although surviving, was discharged due to illness and would never be the same. The impact to the family and community could never truly be understood. After the war, Alfred was the Superintendent for the Freedman's Bureau for Lincoln County, Tennessee and would continue to be an influential force in that community until his death in 1888.

Newspaper Article
ARMS, ARMS!

I AM commissioned by the Governor of Tennessee, to call upon all the people of Lincoln County to bring forward all the effective Rifles, Double and Single Barrel Shot Guns in their possession. They will please bring, or send them to the office of the Clerk of the County Court, without delay. I will examine and fix a reasonable value on each Gun, and receipt for the same, which receipts will be paid by the State of Tennessee.

I am also commanded by the Governor, to report all effective Guns not brought in, with the names of the owners thereof.

Thus you perceive it is left for you to decide, weather you will give up your effective Guns, or suffer the penalty of an Act passed by your Legislature on the 20th of November, 1861. I want the moulds [sic] and wipers of each Gun.

ALFRE BEARDEN, Agent

Dec. 19, 1861. For Lincoln County, Tenn.

[image: photo of Captain Bearden's sword on a Confederate flag draped table in front of his headstone]

[image: photo of Alfred Bearden, likely from the mid 1880's]

Captain Bearden's Sword

An interesting side story is that of the "loss and finding" of Captain Bearden's sword. The sword today is housed in the archives of the University of the South, having been donated by the last surviving Bearden male.

The following story was told by Captain Bearden's sister-in-law at a United Daughters of the Confederacy meeting in 1923. She was the wife of Captain Bearden's brother Matt Bearden. The sword was given to Monroe by his father and engraved on the hilt was his name and rank. The sword was lost during the battle, assumedly Monroe was holding in his hand when he was wounded.

There are many "family" traditions on its finding, etc., although I believe the following story the most accurate due to its source.

Letter regarding the story by Mrs. Susan W. Bearden
Warrenton, Va.

April 21st, 1930.

My dear Mother:

Enclosed find a copy of the Paper about Uncle Monroe's sword. I have kept one copy here for my files. Should you want more copies later I can make them for you. Am returning the manuscript for your disposal. Hope you and Aunt Ellis are getting on nicely. I wrote you yesterday, but thought you would not mind the extra note with the enclosure.

Must get ready for dinner. Goodbye for this time Love to you both.

Ellis

A Paper read by Invitation at a meeting of the U.D.C. in Fayetteville, Tennessee by Mrs. Susan W. Bearden 1923.

This sword belonged to Captain Napoleon Monroe Bearden of the 8th Tennessee. It was found on the battle field at Murfreesboro and carried south by a soldier. Captain Bearden had the sword in his hand, giving orders, when he was wounded by two balls. The dents on the scabbard testify to it. His father, mother and sister, Adelia, went to him and remained with him till his death. His remains were brought to their home on the Athens road 10³/₄ miles from Fayetteville. They were in metallic case and were kept in the old home eight weeks before burial. His grave or vault was fixed two or three times before it gave satisfaction, as it was hard to get materials and workmen at that time. Someone slept in an adjoining room at night and stayed near him in the day.

After the army moved south, his brother-in-law, Mr. Robinson Brown heard a soldier friend inquiring about a scabbard for a sword he had found. He recognized it as his Captain's and told him to look on the handle and he would find "N. M. Bearden" carved with his knife. He handed it to him and it was placed with his belongings in his camp chest. While riding on the train from Atlanta to Griffin, Georgia, he was wounded by a sharp-shooter and carried to a good lady's home where he died and was buried in her garden. She kept his camp chest, and when his remains were brought home by friends

and buried in the same plat as Captain Bearden's, the family plat, the sword was found in his chest and a letter, telling when and how it came into his possession. It was kept by his father and mother until their death, then handed down to the oldest son, and lastly to Mr. Matt. Bearden; now it is in my care for my two boys, Thomas and Ellis Miller Bearden. We all prize it so much. Many soldiers say that they have never seen one with the Confederate Seal on it.

Mrs. Susan Woods Bearden

Copied by Ellie Miller Bearden,

Warrenton, Va.

April 21st, 1930.