



# The Notorious Isaac Earl and His Scouts: Union Soldiers, Prisoners, Spies

*Gordon L. Olson*

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While large armies engaged in epic battles in the eastern theater of the Civil War, a largely unchronicled story was unfolding along the Mississippi River. Thirty "Special Scouts" under the command of Lieutenant Isaac Newton Earl patrolled the river, gathering information about Confederate troop activity, arresting Rebel smugglers and guerillas, and opposing anti-Union insurrection. Gordon Olson gives this special unit full book-length treatment for the first time in *The Notorious Isaac Earl and His Scouts*.

Olson uses new research in assembling his detailed yet very readable account of Earl, a dynamic leader who rose quickly through Union Army ranks to command this elite group. He himself was captured by the Confederates three times and escaped three times, and he developed a strategic -- and later romantic -- relationship with a Southern woman, Jane O'Neal, who became one of his spies. In keeping the river open for Union Army movement of men and supplies to New Orleans, Earl's Scouts played an important, heretofore unheralded, role in the Union's war effort.

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