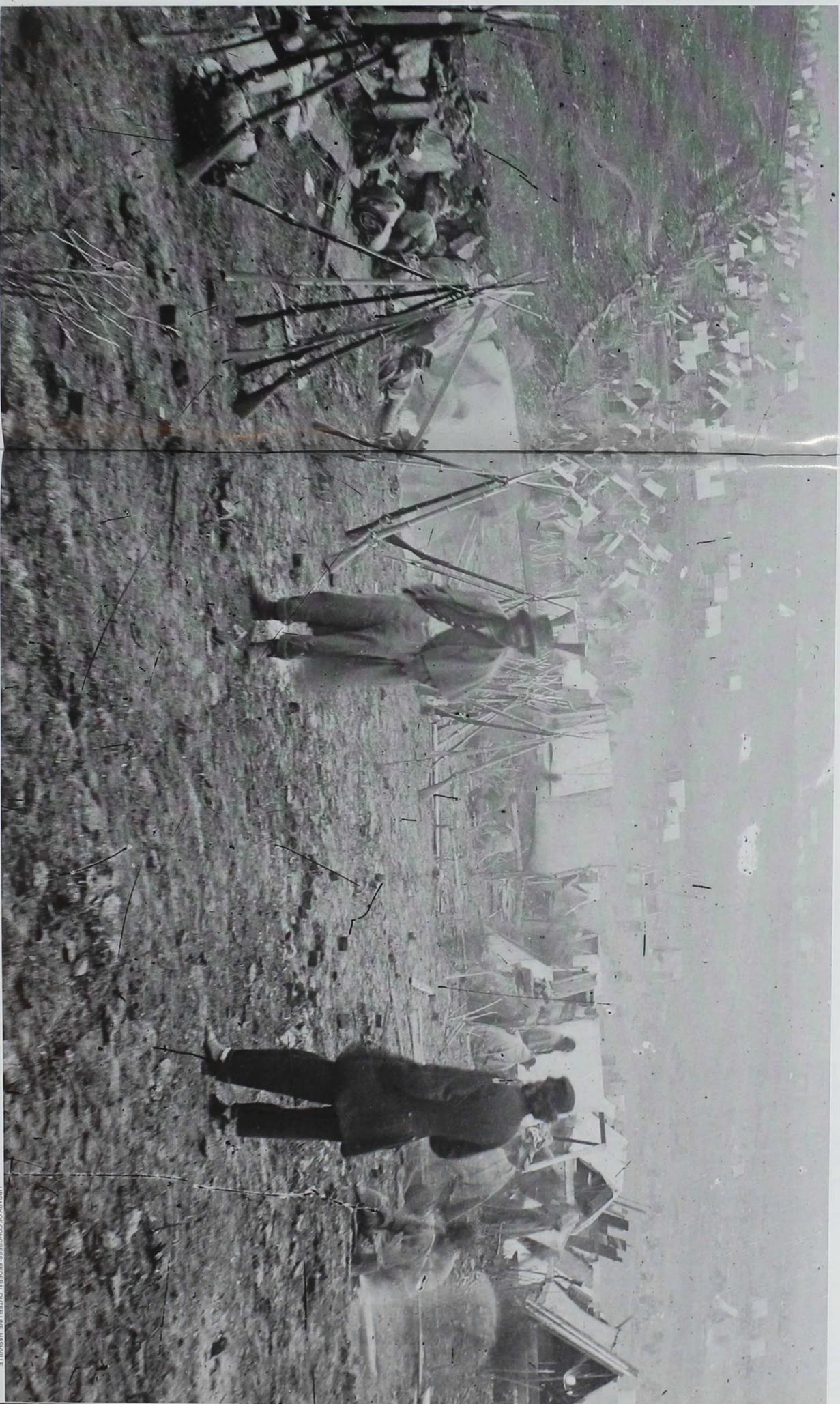


# Awakening to battle...

"THERE CAME, borne to us on the raw morning air, the long weird note of a bugle. It was directly before us. It rose with a low clear, deliberate warble, and seemed to float in the gray sky like the note of a lark. . . . It was the 'assembly'! As it died away I observed that the atmosphere had suffered a change; despite the equilibrium established by the storm, it was electric. Wings were growing on blistered feet. Bruised muscles and jolted bones, shoulders pounded by the cruel knapsack, eyelids leaden from lack of sleep—all were pervaded by the subtle fluid, all were unconscious of their clay. The men thrust forward their heads, expanded their eyes and clenched their teeth. They breathed hard, as if throttled by tugging at the leash. If you had laid your hand in the beard or hair of one of these men it would have cracked and shot sparks."

—Ambrose Bierce, *Civil War soldier and American writer*



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## *. . . and into a storm of lead . . .*

*The horror of battle seared the minds of Iowa soldiers. Here are a few of their accounts.*

*—The Editor*

"Soon the enemy appeared and opened fire on us. The Fifth replied with a will and effect that was admirable. Nobly the boys stood up to the work—loading and firing amid a storm of lead, as if they were drilling—only showing much more enthusiasm and earnestness once we made a charge and the rebels gave way before us."

*—John Quincy Adams Campbell*

"The Rebs . . . made some Desperate Charges to take our Battery . . . Our Cannon poured into their ranks the Grape & Cannister and every time they advanced

it swept them down . . . for two hours [there was] nothing to be heard but the Roar of Cannon."

*—Edward Rolfe*

"The [first] volley passes over our heads, cutting twigs and limbs off the trees. We give a hearty cheer and rush forward, and then the shots of the enemy begin to tell . . . [I] turn to find that George Howell is crowding forward into the front rank. For an instant I see him, a round, red spot on his forehead, and he falls dead, as a bullet crashes through his brain . . . We have but two hundred yards to go after receiving

the first fire of the enemy before we reach their works and capture them at the point of a bayonet . . . yet in doing it our company of not over seventy men incurs a loss of twenty-six killed and wounded. . . . When the earth-works are gained and the enemy is in full retreat to second line of entrenchments, our balls fall thick and fast and do great execution."

—John T. Bell

"My duty [as lieutenant was] to cheer and encourage the men. . . . I was utterly unconscious of danger, and although the dead and dying were dropping at my feet, I felt no emotion nor sorrow—there was a strange, unaccountable lack of feeling with me that followed me through the entire action."

—John Quincy Adams Campbell

"You had no time to anticipate or think—you were killed or you were safe, and it was over."

—Unidentified soldier

"We were now within fifteen miles of Lexington, and were enabled to hear with startling distinctness the incessant war of the conflict, and during every instant from the morning of Wednesday till 2 o'clock of the morning of Thursday, there seemed to be a tremendous thunder-storm playing on the verge of the horizon. At a house where I stopped for a glass of water, the next day, a lady informed me that her daughter, on Wednesday, had counted before dark some three hundred and eighty distinct explosions."

—Franc Wilkie, Iowa war correspondent

"The Site of the battle was grand but Awful . . . a person looking on would think that ardy a Man could Escape in such a storm of shot and shell there was over 100 cannon just booming all the time."

—Edward Rolfe

"My musket became so dirty with the cartridge powder, that in loading it the ramrod stuck fast and I could neither get it up nor down, so I put a cap on, elevated the gun and fired it off. But now I had no ramrod, and throwing down my musket, I picked up a Belgian rifle lying at the side of a dead rebel, unstrapped the cartridge box from his body, and advanced to our company, taking my place with the

boys. While in this position I witnessed a wonderful sight—thickly-flying musket balls. I have never seen hail falling thicker than the minie balls were flying in the air above us, though too high to do any harm. Our ammunition soon ran out and the entire regiment was ordered to the rear to replenish our cartridge boxes."

—Alexander G. Downing

"Three columns . . . advanced on the forts . . . bending their heads against the awful storm of grape and canister from all our cannon. A perfect blaze of close range musketry, too, mowed them down like grass. Even a foe could feel pity to see brave men so cruelly slaughtered."

—Samuel H. M. Byers

"The 'zip' of the rifle balls have a particular stinging sound, and the shriek of bursting shells causes one to dodge instinctively . . . each soldier is impressed with the belief that he will not be struck. . . . A feeling of intense hatred of the enemy possesses him as the charge is made and he sees his comrades falling about him, and he is carried away with a wild desire to kill and slay in turn. For the moment those opposing him are not human beings, but devils and demons whom it is his duty to slaughter without mercy."

—John T. Bell

"[I] have heard the booming cannon, bursting shell, whistling ball, the incessant deep sounding roll of musketry, each separately, and again all combined in one indescribably commingling, deafening sound, the falling branches, crashing trees. Around me the dead, the dying, the wounded, the cowards leaving the ranks, flying past me, seeking safety, officers and men cheering each other on. The dead on the field after the battle, digging of graves, the pursuit of a fleeing army, road filled with wagons broken and burning, tents, blankets, baggage of every description."

—Seneca Thrall

"Death had come in all imaginable shapes, in one case six of our men having been killed by a cannon ball which passed through the center of a solid oak tree eighteen inches in diameter, behind which they had taken shelter in a line."

—John T. Bell

## . . . then finding the fallen . . .

"Some of the wounds were horrible; some had the lower jaw shot away, others had arms torn off, others came in with legs dangling over the sides of the wagon, all thirsty, and calling almost incessantly for water. A flag of truce went out soon after to bring in the wounded and bury the dead, and up to a late hour the work still went on."

—Franc Wilkie, Iowa war correspondent

"I got behind our second battle line, found some of the Co. & we was set to gathering up wounded rebs. . . . I picked up a gun but it wasnt the same kind as what I left up in front but I traded with the first wounded reb I come to. He was a middle age man wounded bad through the hips & would need two men & a stretcher. His gun, an Enfield rifle, lay near by. I told him would like to trade guns with him. He said 'take them both. I donnot think I will have use for a gun anny more.' I have often wondered what became of that man."

—Van Whipple Sargent

"At one point I met a tall confederate coming up the road with one leg hanging helpless and using two old muskets for crutches. The thigh of his left leg had been shattered by an exploded shell, and after receiving directions as to where he could find a surgeon he moved off, the noise of the broken ends of the bones distinctly heard as they were thrown past each other by the swinging limb, refusing all aid from the stretcher-bearers."

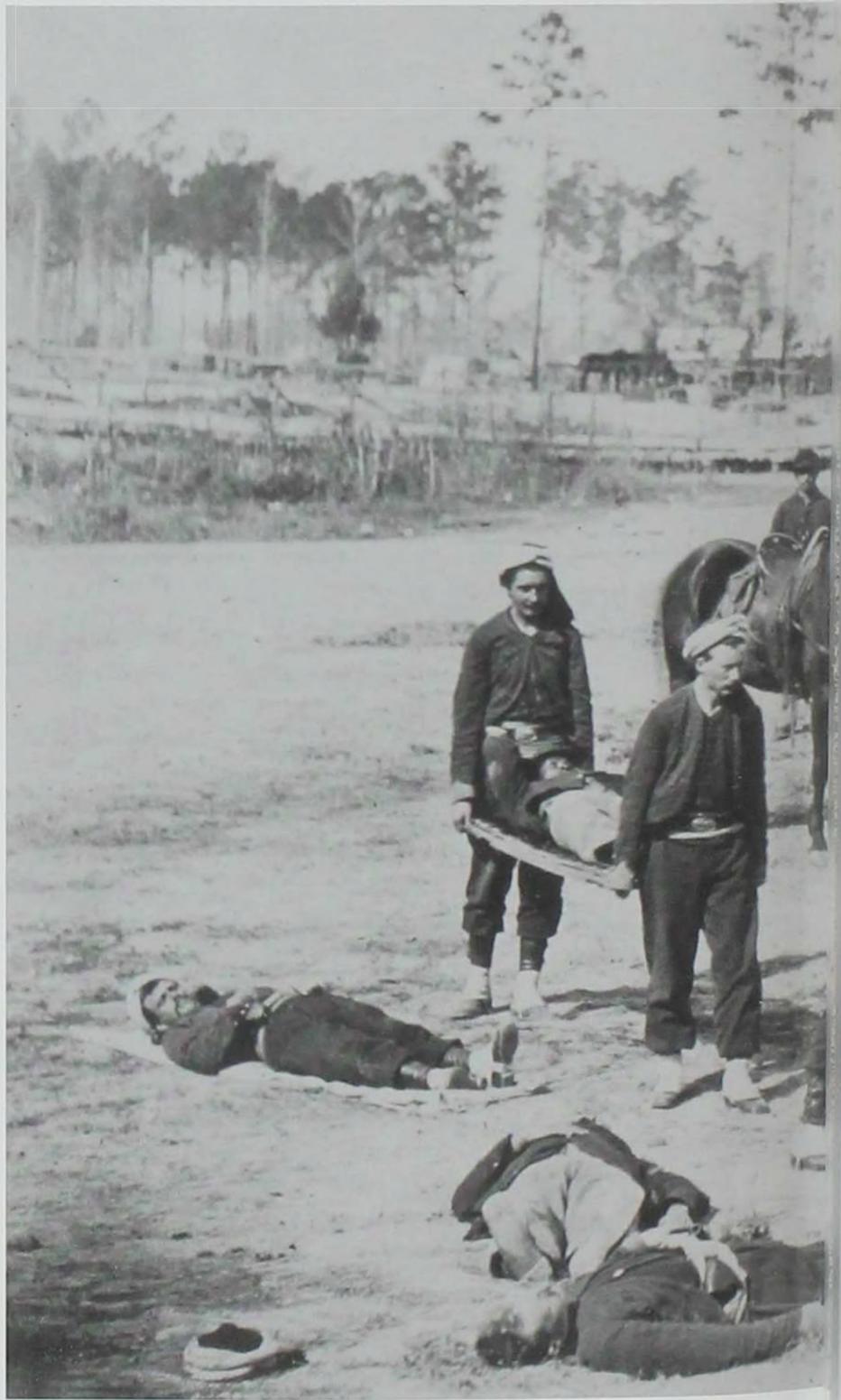
—John Quincy Adams Campbell

"We sent in a flag of truce to bring off dead this afternoon. Found 97 on the field, mostly stripped of their shoes & pants. Also 3 men who had lain out 2 days and night still alive & stripped to the skin."

—Alonzo Abernethy

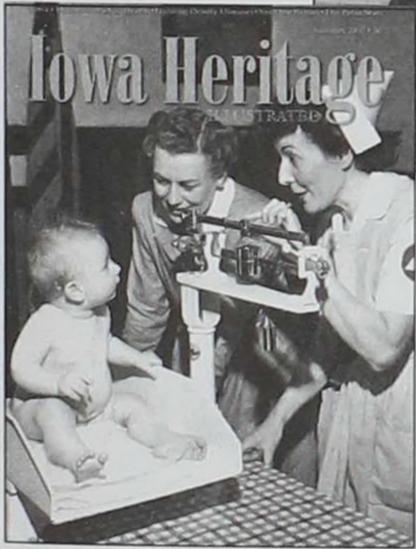
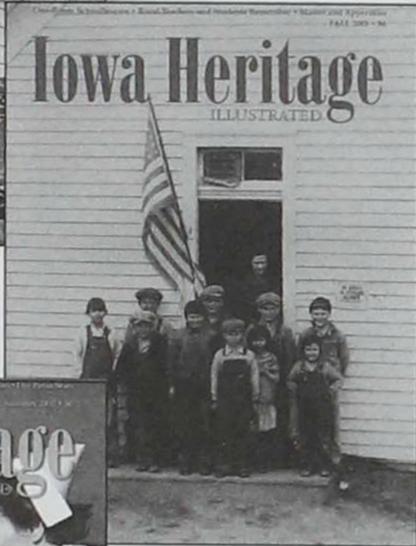
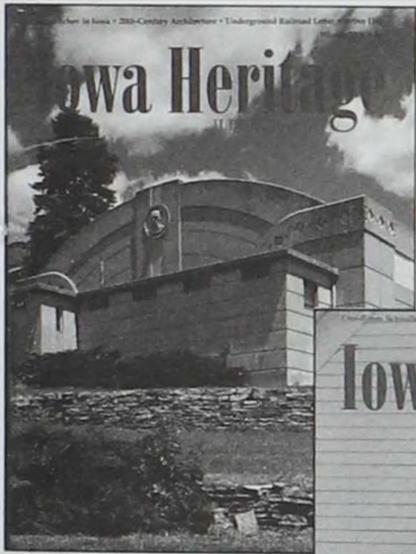
"Several wounded were found, who had lain there for four days and nights, one, wounded in the arm and shoulder, had waited upon the others who could not move; had got a little water and food from the canteens and haversacks of dead men laying near."

—Seneca B. Thrall



"After dark, our regt was sent out to the right front. Should think near whare our first line was. We was cautioned to keep quiet & in our places but could lay down. I was awakned some time in the night & we silently went back the way we come. Every thing was quiet except ocasionaly a groan & cryes from wounded men left on the field."

—Van Whipple Sargent



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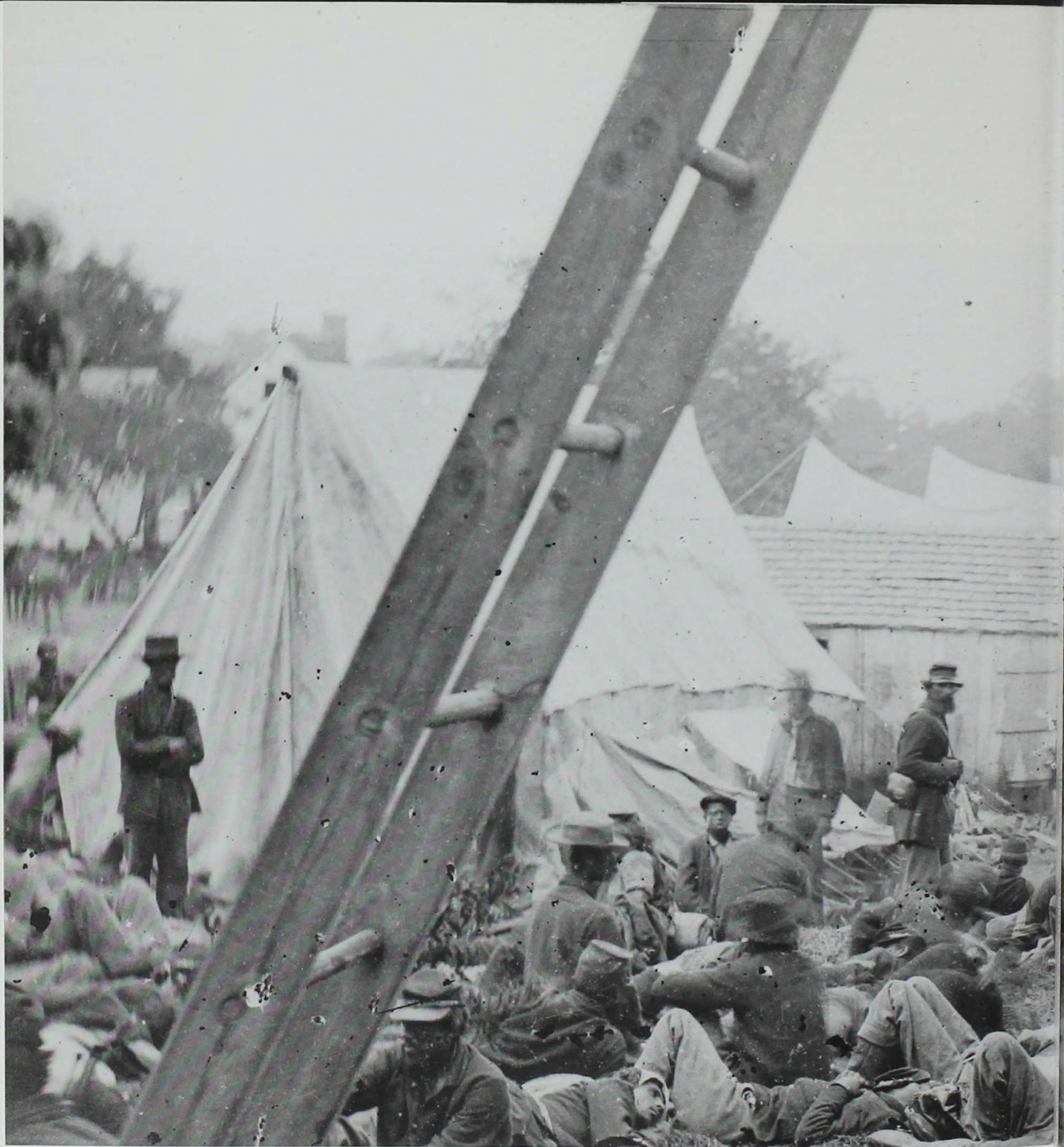
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ambulance crew practices a drill. For much of the war, civilian teams drove ambulances, and common soldiers and young musicians were ordered to move the wounded to field and regimental hospitals. Inventors struggled to develop vehicles that did not jostle and jolt the wounded. The combination of trained ambulance corps with non-combatant medics was one of the major results of the war.



An ambulance crew practices a drill. For much of the war, civilian teamsters drove ambulances, and common soldiers and young musicians were assigned to move the wounded to field and regimental hospitals. Inventors were urged to develop vehicles that did not jostle and jolt the wounded. The innovation of trained ambulance corps with non-combatant medics was one beneficial result of the war.



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*... and witnessing the wounded.*



A field hospital in Virginia.

"I WAS DOWN TO THE DEPOT and seen them bring in the wounded; it was an awful sight to look at they were wounded in all kinds of ways. Some had lost an arm others a leg Some toes and fingers, I Saw one poor fellow that was shot through the face, the ball went in close to his left cheek bone and came out through the right side of his under jaw his mouth and nose was so stopd up with blood he could hardly breathe they said it got to bleeding while they were coming here and he came very near bleeding to death he was covered with blood from head to foot several others were shot through the mouth and face. one had a ball shot into his mouth and out the back of his neck, they were all naked or nearly so, they had rode about 150 miles in wagons through the dust and hot Sun. there wounds had only been dressed twice and poorly done at that, the flies had blowed some of their wounds and the worms were working in their flesh. others looked as if they had commenced to mortify not withstanding all these misfortunes they were cheerful and sociable I did not hear a single word of complaint nor a groan with one exception, they all felt glad that Old Forest had got such a thrashing."

—George C. Bradway



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A field hospital in Virginia.

... and witnessing the wounded.

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