

We Are Coming, Father Abraham

Iowa Responds to the Call to Arms

by Timothy Walch

Iowa was weary of war by the winter of 1864. The Union had won great victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg the previous summer, but still the rebellion dragged on. It seemed to many—particularly women who faced another planting season without their husbands and sons—that the conflict would never end. Adding to the stress, more troops were needed. President Lincoln issued an urgent call to the states on February 1: meet your quota of soldiers by March or be subject to another draft.

How would Iowa respond? As it had done in the previous three years, Iowa rose to the occasion. "You shall have our quota without [a draft]," wrote Iowa Adjutant General Nathaniel Baker to the president. Quoting an 1862 recruiting song, he wrote: "We are coming, Father Abraham, with 500,000 more."

Baker's bombast aside, Iowa was exceptionally patriotic in responding to the cause of the Union over the entire course of the conflict. Year in and year out, Iowa met all but one of the quotas set by the War Department.

When war was first declared in April 1861, most states, including Iowa, quickly met their quotas for 90-day enlistments. Many of the first recruits expected the war to be a short-lived adventure.

Except for Iowans' willingness to serve, the state was hardly prepared to do its part when war was declared. There was no organized state militia in April 1861 and no formal means to organize volunteers. To be sure, there were a number of local militias in various cities and communities across the state, but these were little more than social clubs that practiced military drilling.

Iowa had plenty of plowshares, but hardly a sword had been forged.

And yet there was no denying the war fever that gripped the state even before the attack on Fort Sumter on April 14. In fact, there had been growing pressure on Governor Samuel Kirkwood and the General Assembly to organize a state militia in anticipation of conflict. As early as January, Kirkwood had received numerous letters from standing local militias such as the Dubuque City Guards and the Iowa City Dragoons offering to serve when the first Iowa regiment was organized. The volume of mail, the press, and popular opinion convinced Kirkwood to take action. So it was no problem for the governor when only two days after Fort Sumter he received a telegram from Secretary of War Simon Cameron calling on Iowa to organize a single regiment for "immediate service." Kirkwood responded with enthusiasm; records show that the 1st Iowa Infantry totaled nearly a thousand men.

By the end of April, the governor was organizing two more regiments. He boasted that "I can raise 10,000 [recruits] in this State in twenty days." A week later, he asked Cameron, "How many more regiments will be required from Iowa and for how long? I am overwhelmed with applications."

That creation of the first Iowa regiment was symbolic, but the regiment saw only modest action. Although the 1st Iowa mustered into federal service on May 14, the regiment stayed in Keokuk doing little more than cooking and drilling for almost a month. Finally, on June 13, the regiment joined other regiments in Missouri, where it fought in the battle at Wilson's Creek on August 10, comporting itself with remarkable bravery. The regiment returned to Iowa after Wilson's Creek, having more than completed its 90 days of service.

Patriotic feelings remained high in Iowa throughout

most of 1861, and Kirkwood had no problem finding men who were willing to serve. In several additional calls for volunteers that year, Kirkwood was asked to send some 19,000 troops; in response, he would send more than 22,000. "Our people are loyal, patriotic, and devoted," he wrote to the War Department. "Their hearts are with you in the national struggle."

The governor stoked the patriotism of Iowa's citizenry. On September 10, after overseeing the organization of the 2nd through the 10th Iowa infantry regiments and the first three Iowa cavalry regiments, he again called for more recruits by invoking Iowans' loyalty to friends and relatives already in service. "It is your cause, as well as theirs, in which they are engaged," Kirkwood intoned. "It is the cause of government, of home, of country, of freedom, of humanity, of God himself." Within a month he was organizing the 11th and 12th Iowa infantry regiments and the 4th Iowa Cavalry.

But the number of potential Iowa recruits was quickly diminishing. The next three infantry regiments were made up of older men who had families and were ambivalent about leaving their homes and farms to defend the Union.

It seemed that the patriotism of Iowans was wearing thin by the end of 1861. It would not be as easy to fill future calls for more Iowa troops.

The burden of the war—not only in Iowa, but across the North—was evident in that the next year the War Department took over the responsibility for organizing new regiments. This orderly, structured approach eventually led to the establishment of three more Iowa infantry regiments during 1862.

Kirkwood met the challenge with aplomb. "I now assure you," he wrote Lincoln, "that the State of Iowa will be found in the future as in the past prompt and ready to do her duty to the country in this time of sore trial. Our harvest is just upon us and we have scarcely men enough to save our crops, but if need be, our women can help." And later he wrote Secretary of War Edwin Stanton that

"our whole State appears to be volunteering. . . . The companies are now coming into rendezvous as rapidly as I can furnish blankets for them."

By August, Iowa had organized no fewer than 18 infantry regiments, nearly five cavalry regiments, and three artillery batteries since hostilities began. And it was not long before the state sent an additional 22 regiments. "Recruiting is going on in this State magnificently," Adjutant General Baker had remarked. "I like a draft." What Baker meant is that he liked the *threat* of a draft.

Although used as a threat throughout the war, drafts were "not intended to be much more than a pressure to encourage volunteering," according to historian Leland Sage and many others. Because being drafted was often seen as a disgrace, and because draftees received no bounties, the likelihood of a draft spurred enlistments.

The draft law applied to all men between the ages of 20 and 45, including aliens planning to become citizens. Exemptions included the physically or mentally impaired, the only son of a widow or infirm parents, and

a widower with dependent children. "The law gave a draftee two options: commutation by the payment of \$300, or furnishing a substitute [often for \$300]," Sage writes. "Many men used a simpler plan of evasion: on the day of enrollment they simply went visiting in distant parts."

Kirkwood was particularly stymied and frustrated by the difficulty of filling vacancies in standing regiments, which had been depleted largely by disease. As in other states, however, men in

Iowa preferred to enlist together with their friends and relatives in newly organized regiments rather than fill individual vacancies in existing units. But as historian James Jacobsen points out, filling vacancies was "a strategic necessity, given that veteran regiments were far more efficient in integrating and training recruits than were green units."

The challenge to fill depleted standing regiments would resurface the next year. Kirkwood argued that new recruits would serve in regiments that had earned

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WASHINGTON, D. C., WAR DEPARTMENT, }
August 14, 10 A. M. 1862. }

To Gov. KIRKWOOD:

Your regiments will be accepted if filled up this week as volunteers, but the proceedings for draft should be vigorously pushed forward to fill up the old regiments even if not otherwise required.

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

Under the repeated threat of a draft, Northern communities pushed to fill their quotas. According to historian Russell Johnson, "Fewer than 10 percent of Union soldiers were conscripts; adding draft substitutes, the number rises to just 10.2 percent."

a reputation and under seasoned officers who knew how to take care of their men. As officers departed, opportunities for promotion would open up. But the problem continued throughout the war.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1863, six new Iowa units were authorized and organized. Among these units was the 1st Iowa African Infantry, which comprised approximately 800 Iowans of color; the officers were white. (A black soldier received no bounty until after 1863, when it was set at \$10.)

Kirkwood and Baker worked diligently to convince the War Department that the state had done more than its share. Except for the 1st Iowa, all Iowa recruits were enlisted for terms of three years or until dismissed. Many other states enlisted their recruits for terms as short as 90 days. Kirkwood and Baker argued that length of service, as well as the number of recruits, should be used to determine Iowa's quota.

The War Department agreed and calculated that Iowa had exceeded its quotas by nearly 14,000 men for all calls up to June. The number of additional men required from Iowa that year was expected to be about 12,600, leaving a credit of 1,281.

Then in October, Lincoln called for 300,000 more troops—well over 7,000 of these from Iowa. Iowa's credit would not begin to cover the quota. Baker argued that Iowans in other states' regiments should be credited to Iowa, and reenlisted veterans should be counted. Once again, a draft in Iowa was averted.

William Stone, Iowa's new governor in 1864, was a decorated veteran of the Battle of Shiloh and former prisoner of war. He proclaimed that "the honored name [that] our brave boys, through years of toil and danger have won for our State must not be tarnished by us in the closing scenes of the war."

Service was a matter of personal honor for Stone, but was it for all Iowans? Concerned that some men in the state were shirking their duty, and with a new quota set to go into effect on March 1, 1864, Stone issued an order prohibiting any state resident from leaving Iowa before March 10. He wanted to make sure that all eligible men were available for duty—under pain of executive order.

Iowa did meet its adjusted quotas for March and May without any difficulty, but not in September. Baker, who had been excellent at forming new units, was overwhelmed by this call to arms in September. The credit surplus evaporated. Iowa answered the call

State of Iowa.

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
Clinton, August 19, 1862. }

GENERAL ORDERS, NUMBER 81.

The clerks of the District Courts, under the law of 1861 entitled "an act to amend the militia law of the State of Iowa," in the following named counties, have made returns of the *number* of persons liable to do military duty in their respective counties:

Adams,.....	270
Allamakee,.....	1,895
Benton,.....	1,439
Buchanan,.....	1,302
Boone,.....	702
Calhoun, 1 township,.....	34
Cedar,.....	2,099
Chickasaw,.....	701
Clayton,.....	3,306
Clark,.....	888
Clinton,.....	3,280
Crawford, 3 townships,.....	80
Delaware,.....	1,770
Des Moines,.....	3,131
Decatur,.....	1,343
Dubuque,.....	4,421
Fayette,.....	1,971
Fremont,.....	881
Greene,.....	238
Grundy,.....	173
Guthrie,.....	517
Hardin,.....	711
Howard,.....	500
Humboldt,.....	64
Jefferson,.....	2,056
Jones,.....	2,072
Lee,.....	4,455
Linn,.....	2,828
Lucas,.....	948
Louisa,.....	1,599
Mahaska,.....	2,779
Marion,.....	2,627
Mitchell,.....	594
Mills,.....	518
Monroe,.....	1,420
Montgomery,.....	233
Muscatine,.....	2,248
Polk,.....	2,027
Poweshiek,.....	1,058
Pottawattomie,.....	852
Scott,.....	4,117
Story,.....	656
Shelby,.....	96
Tama,.....	1,083
Taylor,.....	581
Union,.....	431
Van Buren,.....	2,261
Warren,.....	1,679
Wright,.....	115

The Clerks of the District Courts in the following counties have made a return of the *names* of persons liable to do military duty in the townships in their respective counties:

Blackhawk,.....	1,443
Benton,.....	1,439
Bremer,.....	824
Cass,.....	282
Calhoun, 1 township,.....	34
Cedar,.....	2,099
Dallas,.....	829
Davis,.....	2,105
Floyd,.....	669
Franklin,.....	212
Grundy,.....	173
Henry,.....	2,725
Hamilton,.....	246
Iowa,.....	1,393
Johnson,.....	2,691
Jones,.....	2,072
Linn,.....	2,828
Marshall,.....	1,015
Mitchell,.....	594
Monroe,.....	1,420
Muscatine,.....	2,280
Poweshiek,.....	1,058
Wright,.....	115
Washington,.....	2,224

I direct that the Clerks of the District Courts of Counties not in last list send me list of *names* returned to them by townships, as liable to do military duty, and

I direct that the Clerks of Counties who have made no return whatever, make immediate returns to me by townships, of the *names* of men liable to do military duty under laws of this State.

By order of the Commander-in-chief,
N. B. BAKER,
Adjutant Gen. of Iowa.

List

We the Undersigned of
 Sums Set opposite our names
 to J. W. Young for the
 of procuring volunteers to fill the Quota
 of Center Township, Cedar County,
 ordered to take place during the month
 of February A.D. 1865. Payment to be
 made when the sum of \$1200
 shall in the aggregate shall be subscribed.

Names	Names
Henry Thelmer \$50.00	Wells Sprad 50.00
James M. Thelmer 50.00	W. A. Griswell 50.00
David Kelly 50.00	W. Flowers 25.00
Marion Thelmer 50.00	Joseph Walters 50.00
Peter Gay 50.00	Wm. Long 15.00
George Thelmer 50.00	Emanuel Wears 50.00
Washington Harris 50.00	W. Schmitt 50.00
R. Swartzendruber 50.00	Wm. Dean 50.00
D. M. Jones 50.00	J. Sherr 50.00
A. D. Kellogg 50.00	Mr. Sherr 50.00
Wm. Humphrey 50.00	J. P. Ouelletson 50.00
R. Hill 50.00	N. N. Exline 50.00
J. Waters 50.00	P. W. Thompson 50.00
O. P. Reeves 50.00	Wm. Gilmore 50.00
David W. McGosh 100.00	R. C. Smith 50.00
Wm. Cook 50.00	John L. Howell 50.00
Christian Phelps 100.00	
C. Hammond 50.00	
J. M. Thelmer	

In anticipation of a possible draft in February 1865, over 60 citizens of Center Township in Cedar County pledged money to fund bounties. Out of this pool of money, bounties would be paid to men who enlisted, thus helping fill the township's quota without a draft. The average pledge was about \$40 (several hundred dollars in today's dollars).

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with about 4,000 soldiers; the majority of them were drafted.

Iowa's sense of service was not limitless.

This was also evident when Stone and other mid-western governors offered to recruit additional regiments to serve as something of a home guard. These soldiers were to be enlisted for 100 days to guard borders, fortifications, and military installations. In Iowa, this duty would include patrols along the Missouri border and guard duty at the Rock Island Arsenal, among other assignments. Once the president gave his approval, Stone agreed to raise 10,000 men for this service by the end of April. "Iowa is all right," he assured the War Department. "The 10,000 are com-

ing rapidly. We intend to beat Illinois and Indiana." Stone was wrong. Even though the obligation was brief and the duty light, fewer than 5,000 Iowans volunteered for this supplementary home guard.

In December 1864 Lincoln issued what turned out to be a final call for men. Again Baker made a strong case that Iowa had more than fulfilled all of its obligations and should be excused from raising additional troops. After "considerable correspondence, and nearly a quarrel," the War Department accepted Baker's argument. Enlistments did continue, however, and Iowa sent an additional 854 men in early 1865.

On April 29, 1865, the War Department ended its recruitment. The war was over. The nation had been preserved and slavery abolished.

As a state of not quite two decades, Iowa was proud of its contribution to the war. "Indeed, Iowans came to believe that they had sent more men per capita to the Union army than had the citizens of any other loyal state," writes historian Robert R. Dykstra, who adds, "This happens to be wrong." Dykstra does note that "49 percent of Iowa's prewar white military-age population did take up arms, a record outclassed by only four other northern states."

There is no disputing that Iowans paid a terrible price. Dykstra records that "thirteen thousand Iowans—

19 percent of those who went off to war—never came home or returned only to die."

On January 23, 1865, Governor Stone had assessed Iowa's service in an address to the state. "Among the first to rally in vindication of our insulted flag," he said, "your soldiers have been constantly in the front, performing the longest marches, participating in the severest battles, and bearing themselves on all occasions with the most

conspicuous gallantry. Secure in the admiration of a grateful country, our state has won a high place in the pages of history."

Setting aside the florid language, Stone made an important point: national service required substantial sacrifice. Iowans could hold their heads high.

Iowa had beaten its plowshares into swords for Father Abraham. Now, in the aftermath of war, Iowa could reforge those swords back into plowshares to feed a growing nation. ❖

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 30, 1864.

To Major Thomas Duncan:

Keep volunteering up as much as possible after the 5th of September, and let it be known that volunteers will be counted on the quota of the present call up to the last practicable moment before the drafted are accepted and sent to rendezvous.

JAMES B. FRY.

Director of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library for 18 years, Timothy Walch now volunteers at the State Historical Society of Iowa.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources used for this article included H. E. Brainerd, "Iowa and the Draft," *Iowa Historical Record* 4 (1888); J. E. Briggs, "The Enlistment of Iowa Troops During the Civil War," *Iowa Journal of History* (1917); Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993); James E. Jacobsen, "Iowa's Civil War Rendezvous Camps, 1861-1866: A Study" (which will be posted on www.iowaNationalGuard.com), funded by the Iowa Army National Guard, State of Iowa, and National Guard Bureau, Dept. of Defense; Russell L. Johnson, *Warriors into Workers: The Civil War and the Formation of Urban-Industrial Society in a Northern City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003) pp. 58-100, 316-24; Russell L. Johnson, "Volunteer While You May: Manpower Mobilization in Dubuque, Iowa," in *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments*, ed. Paul A. Cimballa and Randall M. Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Susan Kuecker, "Reverberations of War: Cedar Rapids in 1865," *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* (Fall 1999). Also useful were three books by James M. McPherson: *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and *What They Fought For, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1994).