

ships have been through the same dangers, and now leave them to bear my burden? *Not much.*"

A poignant expression of this high-minded attitude appears in letters exchanged by William F. Vermilion and his wife, Mary. A captain in the 36th Iowa Infantry, William mustered into service in August 1862 and less than a month later wrote to Mary that "my love for you all has increased since I left you, but I know that it is my duty to stay here and try to be one of the many that God has raised to put down this rebellion and blot out the institution of slavery."

In another letter William wrote about his sense of pride in place: "We live in Iowa, thank God. A state that has more than its quota of men in the field, and not [a] one, 3, or 9 month [enlistment] or drafted man among them. No traitor in Congress to disgrace our fair fame, by voting to cut off supplies. Whether the Government stands or falls, we will love Iowa."

In a letter just before Christmas, Mary echoed his pride—but also reflected her frustration with the inconsistent response of Northern states that she considered less patriotic. "I am proud of Iowa," she wrote William during a visit to relatives in Indiana. "I am glad that

our home is there. No other state has acquitted herself so nobly as Iowa."

But was the sacrifice worth it? No doubt more than a few soldiers received letters from their families questioning the purpose and value of the war. Mary Vermilion was in such a mood in a letter to her husband in March 1863. "I want to know whether our government is really worth dying for or not," she wrote rhetorically. "Sometimes, my good love, I feel like I am willing to have the war end any way so that you can get home once more. If I lose you, my beloved, what will the country be to me? What will I care whether it is free and happy or not? Oh darling, I can hardly bear to think of it. You are worth more to me than 10,000 republics!" Mary Vermilion was no traitor but she was frustrated with the course of the war and the heartache of missing her husband.

Soldiers often faced competing claims on their sense of duty. In the fall of 1864, as the war bogged down into stalemate, Benjamin Stevens wrote to his mother, Elizabeth Stevens. A citizen of Oskaloosa, Benjamin had joined the 15th Iowa Infantry in 1861. In the years that followed, he saw action at Shiloh and Vicksburg, among other campaigns. After Vicksburg, he left the 15th Iowa to become an officer in the 48th U.S. Colored Infantry.

Joining up for the bounties

PENSION BOUNTY & PATENT AGENCY
The Undersigned is duly
Licensed as
PENSION & BOUNTY AGENT
AND COMMERCIAL BROKER.
FOR TAMA COUNTY
All business entrusted to him will receive
prompt attention.
Toledo July 2d 1863. T. A. GRAHAM.
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Attorneys and agents advertised their skills in winning claims for what soldiers and their families were owed, including bounties. These two advertisements appeared in 1864 in the *Iowa Transcript*, a newspaper in Tama County.

"The new ones cannot endure marches," Iowan Seneca Thrall wrote in November 1862, describing unseasoned soldiers. "The old ones called them 'Bountyites,' and we would see many of them lying by the road side, shoes and stockings off, footsore and completely exhausted.... Then the old soldier would call out derisively: 'Halloa, Bounty, hard work to earn that \$100, aint it? Aint you glad you jined the army? I say old boy, I will tell you how to keep your feet from getting sore.' The new one looks up, eye brightens, he thinks he is about to receive the benefit of the old one's experience, and asks how. [The old soldier replies,] 'Wrap that \$100 around your feet.'"

Generally, however, soldiers' bounties were no laughing matter. Receiving military bounties (sometimes in land, sometimes in money) was a strong American tradition dating back to the Revolutionary War. Throughout the Civil War, Congress frequently adjusted the amount of federal monetary bounties, as well as when they would be paid to the soldier, and to whom they would be paid if the soldier died in battle. Localities and states paid additional bounties.

Iowa newspapers, letters, and diaries hint at the impor-

He was a seasoned veteran by the time he sat down to write his mother. She had asked him to return home to help her with the family farm. Her husband, Simeon, also a soldier, had died, and her second son was a prisoner of war. She needed Ben and wrote as much in a letter on August 24. In his response, he wrote that he had applied for a 20-day leave of absence.

That would be the extent of the time he could give to his mother. He would not, or could not, turn his back on his country. "Well, Mother," he wrote, "as far as resigning is concerned—I will tell you—I feel that my country needs my services for at least six [more] months. She will then be out of danger." It is not known how his mother reacted to her son's rejection of her plea; no response has survived.

As far as Benjamin Stevens was concerned, his god and his country needed him more than his mother: "Every man that feels that he is accountable to a just God for the deeds done in the body should give himself as a willing sacrifice to his country in this, her hour of need. I would never live in America if our cause is not successful." It was a clear and forthright statement of personal patriotism.

Iowans were fighting for union and, to a degree, emancipation—as noble as these causes were to the nation—but also for their very sense of self-worth. The

diaries and letters of Cyrus Boyd, Philip Goode, Abner Dunham, Mary and William Vermilion, Seneca Thrall, and the Stevens family reveal the multiple meanings of Iowa's contribution to this national civic sacrifice. These Iowans speak to us with frank honesty about why Iowans entered the Civil War. Simply put, they fought for country, community, and comrades. ❖

Timothy Walch serves on the Iowa Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission and is a former member of the State Historical Society of Iowa Board of Trustees.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources used for this article include [Philip H. Goode], "'A Pretty Hard Business': The Civil War Diary of Philip H. Goode," transcribed by Edward W. Vollertsen, *Palimpsest* (Summer 1991); 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); 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); James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Edward Vermilion, *Love Amid the Turmoil: The Civil War Letters of William and Mary Vermilion*, ed. Donald Elder (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003). See also letters and a diary edited by Mildred Throne and published in the following issues of the *Iowa Journal of History*: "An Iowa Doctor in Blue: Letters of Seneca B. Thrall, 1862–1864" (1960); "Civil War Diary of C. F. Boyd" (1952); and "Civil War Letters of Abner Dunham" (1955).

tance and appeal of bounties, especially in 1864 as three-year enlistments ended and Lincoln continued to threaten a draft if local quotas weren't met. In August, Nathaniel Baker, Iowa's adjutant general, reported, "The men who might otherwise enlist are awaiting the high bounties sure to be offered by cities, counties and individuals."

"We have served three years without bounty & now want all there is going," D. S. Sigler, from Osceola, Iowa, wrote to the district provost marshal in December 1864. A few weeks later he added that a \$700 bounty would be about right. In any case he and his friend would "go to the [quota] credit of the place from which we get the most Bounty—if we go at all."

According to historian Russell Johnson, "Willing volunteers migrated from rural to urban areas seeking larger bounties."

At first glance, to enlist for money rather than to serve the cause might seem callous. But consider the wage-earning man who was joining the army and leaving behind a family with little means of support. Federal, state, and local bounties helped alleviate the hard times they would face.

—Ginalie Swaim, editor

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of

G. R. STRUBLE

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All kinds of Law and collecting business promptly attended to.

Having procured all the laws, of the United States, on Bounties, Pensions and Soldiers' Pay, I am prepared and will give special attention to obtaining and collecting,

Pensions due Invalid Soldiers, the widow and minor heirs of deceased soldiers.

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No fees charged on soldiers' claims unless the claim is collected.

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500 Thousand Men WANTED!

THE LAST CALL.

Jasper county is required to furnish about 100 men within 20 days or a Draft will inevitably be made. Drafting List is already prepared \$402 to veterans and \$302 to new recruits is yet offered as a

BOUNTY

The undersigned, Recruiting Agent, will visit the townships to get Volunteers: Let all of this matter in earnest.

Evening Meetings will be held as follows:

- Thursday, 18th, at Slagle school house.
- Friday 19th at Rich Gr. school house.
- Saturday 20th in Newton
- Monday 22d in Lynnville
- Tuesday 23d, in Galesburg
- Wednesday 24th, Wild Cat sch. house.
- Thursday 25th, in Monroe
- Friday 26th, in Vandalia
- Saturday 27, in Greencastle
- Monday 28; Clyde

On Tuesday 29, a Grand Rally in Newton, for the whole county.

Feb. 10 1864.

J. M. IRWIN