

*The*  
**PALIMPSEST**



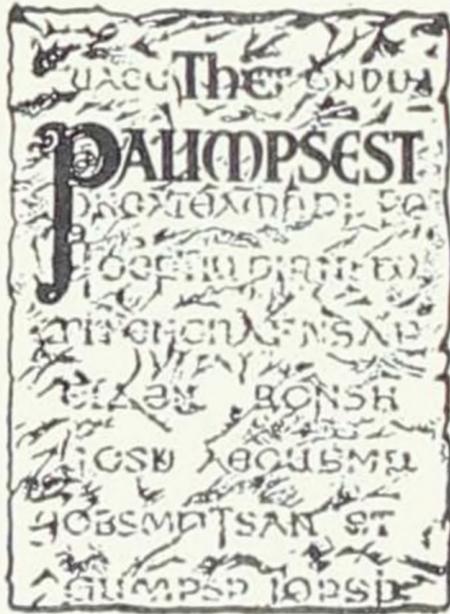
100 DAYS TO GLORY

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## *The Meaning of Palimpsest*

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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## *Contents*

100 Days to Glory	469
<i>Iowa Answers the Call</i>	
<i>Hannibal to Springfield</i>	
<i>Iowan at Wilson's Creek</i>	
<i>In Retrospect</i>	
<i>First Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiment</i>	
<i>Iowa Heroes of Wilson's Creek</i>	
A Note on the Author	499

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## *Illustrations*

Cover: One of the artist's versions of Gen. Lyon's death, reprinted from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, August 24, 1861.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

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ASSOCIATE EDITORS

VOL. LIII

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No. 11

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## 100 Days To Glory

By L. O. CHEEVER

### *Iowa Answers the Call*

The Battle of Wilson's Creek, called Oak Hill by the Confederate forces, was fought in southwestern Missouri on August 10, 1861. It was a struggle for control of Missouri, a slave-holding state, in the first days of the Civil War. An important factor in that battle was the First Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

Following the shelling of Fort Sumter, located in the harbor at Charleston, South Carolina, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation on April 15, 1861, reading in part:

... I therefore call for the Militia of the several states of the Union to the aggregate number of 75,000, to suppress said combination, and execute the laws. I appeal to all loyal citizens for State aid in this effort to maintain the laws, integrity, national union, perpetuity of popular government, and redress wrongs enough endured...

The next day Simon Cameron, Secretary of

War, by wire called on Iowa Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood to furnish "one regiment of militia for immediate service." A follow-up telegram from Cameron the next day called for the Iowa volunteers to rendezvous by May 20.

On April 17, Governor Kirkwood issued a proclamation calling on the militia of the State of Iowa:

... immediately to form in the different counties, Volunteer companies with a view to entering the active Military service of the United States, for the purpose aforesaid. The regiment at present required will consist of ten companies of at least 78 men, each including one Captain and two Lieutenants to be elected by each company. Under the present requisition only one regiment can be accepted, and the companies accepted must hold themselves in readiness for duty by the 20th of May next...

The rendezvous selected by Governor Kirkwood was Keokuk.

Even before the proclamations by President Lincoln and Governor Kirkwood were issued, the organized militia of Iowa, in anticipation of the impending crisis, had offered its services to the governor. The first such offer was made early in January of 1861; other units rapidly followed suit in that same month.

The ten companies, which were to become the First Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiment, were ordered to their quarters by the governor on April 24, 1861. They reached the rendezvous, Keokuk, on different dates between May 1 and May 8.

Personnel making up the ten companies came from Muscatine, Burlington, Davenport, Iowa City, Dubuque, Mount Pleasant, and Cedar Rapids. The men arrived in Keokuk in peacetime uniforms. Jackets varied from dark blue to a light bluish gray. Two companies wore black and white frock coats. Trousers ranged from black with red stripes to a pink satinet with light green stripes. Regular army uniforms had not been supplied to all members of the regiment when the First Iowa departed for Missouri.

The regiment was mustered into Service on May 14. The event was reported in the *Des Moines Valley Whig* of Keokuk in its issue of May 20, 1861, in a column covering the news of May 14:

Yesterday all the companies of the First [Iowa Volunteer Infantry] Regiment were examined by Lieut. Chambers of the U. S. Army. He was accompanied by the Colonel and Surgeon of the Regiment.—Each man of each company marched before the Lieutenant, and his quick eye scanned all the peculiarities of each volunteer. It was a trying ordeal for the men, as they had to run the gauntlet of several hundred curious eyes besides the Lieutenant's. But nearly all of them passed muster. One was rejected for the loss of a thumb, another for the loss of an arm, another one being under age, and a few more for other causes.

As one of the Governor's Grays of Dubuque marched up, the Lieutenant requested him to stop and wait. When all the rest had passed, the Lieutenant turned and said to him, "What's the matter with you?"—"Nothing, sir." "But you don't walk right." "Ah, sir I was shot right here (in the groin) in the Mexican War, but it don't hurt me any."

After some further conversation he was allowed to go . . .

The Companies will be sworn in at their respective quarters some time today.

When the volunteers arrived in Keokuk, they found the camp had not been fully built or equipped, so they were quartered in buildings about the city. Regiment members received their arms and other accouterment on May 23. The tents and other camp equipment arrived on May 28, and Camp Ellsworth was established.

The short time existing before the First Iowa went into active service was spent in getting acquainted with the art of war. Company and battalion drills were in progress during many hours of each day. At night the officers were engaged in the study of military movements, the manual of arms, and the rules of discipline. The regiment was still in training when the call came for it to join Union forces at Hannibal, Missouri.

The *Whig* of June 17, reported events leading to the call for the First Iowa to move to Hannibal and of its departure:

About one o'clock this morning the longest, wildest, shrillest, most terrific steamboat whistle ever heard on these waters, startled those who were awake, and awakened those who were asleep. It suggested fearful troubles below, and people ran down in anxious haste to learn what was up. The Jeannie Deans came up from Quincy, bringing orders from Gen. [Nathaniel] Lyon to Col. [Samuel R.] Curtis to move his Regiment immediately to Hannibal . . .

Col. Curtis having received the dispatches, all the companies of his Regiment were hurriedly roused from their quarters. Men were seen and heard running to and fro all over the city, and all the boys were wild with excitement. By 4 o'clock they began to march down to the Levee, and by 5 o'clock the whole Regiment was on board, including Col. Curtis and his staff.

A vast crowd of excited people was gathered on the Levee, and as the noble steamer moved off the welkin rang with cheers from the people and the gallant volunteers. The latter took with them a good supply of cartridges . . .

### *Hannibal To Springfield*

Federal forces in Hannibal had learned that a foundry in that city was manufacturing cannon balls for the secessionists. By General Lyon's orders the Hannibal Home Guard (Union men) had taken possession of the foundry. This brought threats of reprisal from the Confederate adherents. Rumors also were prevalent that these enemy forces might attack the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad. After his arrival at Hannibal, Colonel Curtis immediately took possession of the railroad. Orders had also been sent to Quincy, Illinois for additional troops and some 400 men from that city moved to support the Union forces.

When the Iowans arrived the situation in Hannibal was under control and orders were issued instructing the regiment to move on to Macon City and Renick by rail. The First Iowa then marched cross-country to Boonville. This was a march of fifty-eight miles in less than two and one-half days,

an extraordinary march for these men fresh from their town and country homes and not used to the hardships of a soldier's life.

The *Whig*, on July 1, commented on the march from Renick to the Missouri River, basing its story on a letter received from a correspondent:

**The First Regiment.**—A letter from Goodsell Buckingham says the 1st Regiment were out 48 hours marching from Renick to the Missouri River, opposite Boonville, and only had two meals on the march. The distance traveled was 60 miles. The Regiment was highly complimented by Gen. Lyon for their energy and promptness.

While the Iowans were being molded into a military unit, things were different for General Nathaniel Lyon in St. Louis. Claiborne Jackson, Governor of Missouri, was a rabid Confederate. He refused to heed Lincoln's proclamation and, in fact, called on the state's militia to take over government property in St. Louis. At the same time he called on the state legislature to lead Missouri into the Confederacy. General Lyon moved immediately to protect the Federal armory in St. Louis, with its stockpile of armaments.

When Jackson was thwarted in St. Louis he retreated toward Jefferson City. Unable to secure support for his stand there, Jackson moved upstream to Boonville. Lyon in close pursuit reached the area of the Confederate camp at Boonville on June 17.

As General Lyon's forces approached Boon-

ville, a battery was noted on shore. The boats carrying Lyon's troops turned back and, about eight miles below Boonville, 1,700 U.S. Army Regulars were landed along with four field pieces.

The Federal column marching on the city was met about six miles from Boonville by 2,000 state troops, concealed in thick underbrush and wheat fields. A short skirmish was enough for Jackson's forces—young men badly trained for warfare, undisciplined, and led by an inferior group of officers. Their retreat through Boonville was in great disorder. The Federal forces lost four men killed and nine wounded while the rebels lost four and had twenty-five to thirty wounded. General Lyon showed his humanity when at the conclusion of the battle he had the state troops in a position where he could have mowed them down with terrible effect, but ordered firing stopped and took the rebels prisoners.

At Boonville the Iowa regiment joined General Lyon's army and remained in Camp Cameron until July 3 when the march toward southwestern Missouri was begun.

A correspondent for *Harper's Weekly*, New York, in the July 27 issue gives an idea of the preparations necessary for moving an army, even one as small as General Lyon's:

The time, since the battle at this point [Boonville], has been spent in preparations for a march to the southwestern portion of the state. Not less than three thousand men will

leave from here, and as thirty-seven days' rations are to be taken along, it can easily be imagined that the preparations are neither few or small. About one hundred and fifty wagons are necessary to transact the requisite *materiel*, each of which will be drawn by from two to ten horses or mules. Then a large number of saddle horses are required to carry the higher officers, scouts, etc., making in all a drove of some five or six hundred draught and saddle animals necessary to the starting of our expedition. All these materials, together with forage, haversacks, canteens, and many other articles, have been procured at this point. General Lyon gave out word that he needed a certain number of horses and wagons. If they came in peaceably, good—if not, he would have to send for them. A committee, composed of three officers and two citizens, was appointed to appraise the value of the horses and wagons as they came in, and when purchased, were paid for by draft on St. Louis. It was thought best not to hire the conveyances, but to buy them outright—a determination on the part of the Government that met with the entire approbation of owners irrespective of politics.

Henry O'Connor, a private in Company A, in a history of the First Iowa written for the Iowa State Historical Society in 1862, had this to say about the Iowans and the march:

We made what is usually denominated as forced marches, twenty-four miles a day—except one day, when it poured down a drenching rain on us, we marched eighteen miles—the Iowa boys at the head of the column, with mud and water running off them in the shape of a mixture of rain and sweat—Company A in the van singing national airs. . . . When we had marched eighteen miles and left two Missouri regiments forty-five minutes behind, and their

men dropping by the road-side by the score, the surgeon of Colonel Boernstein's regiment rode in a gallop to the head of the column, and told the General that unless he halted the column he would kill all the Missouri men. We halted right in the rain. The rain held up in an hour or two; we built a fire, dried our clothes on us, (the best way always to save taking cold,) got our supper of some healthy crackers and good coffee, ran round like antelopes, and in the evening, to the surprise of every one, and to the terror of the St. Louis boys, we had a skirmish drill. I believe it was at this time that General Lyon, who first called us Gipsies because of our ragged and dirty appearance, christened us the "Iowa Grey Hounds."

At Grand River in Henry County, Colonel [Samuel D.] Sturgis' command joined with General Lyon's forces. O'Connor reported on the strength of the column at the time: "His command [Sturgis'] consisted of two volunteer regiments from Kansas, 500 regulars, and four pieces of artillery, which, joined to our force of twenty-five hundred troops, put General Lyon at the head of a column of six thousand men and ten pieces of artillery . . ."

Two time-consuming and difficult crossings of the Grand and Osage Rivers were made before reaching a camp site, about ten miles southwest of Osceola.

While making the Osage crossing, a messenger from Springfield brought word that General Franz Sigel's command of some fifteen hundred were surrounded by 8,000 secessionists, normally under the

command of Clairborne Jackson, but really under General Ben McCulloch.

This was what General Lyon was looking for. He had missed Jackson at Boonville. O'Connor described the march that followed:

... No sleep, with orders to march at five; made fires, hurried up our breakfast, swallowed it, and started at quarter past five. This was our great march, kept up through a hot sun until three o'clock. We camped, got supper, and at half-past five, when we were thinking of fixing our beds, the General's bugle sounded a forward march. Off we started, and after measuring off forty-five miles in twenty-two hours—recollect with the loss of two nights' sleep, and only three hours' rest—we fetched up in a cornfield... sleepy and hungry. We were ordered to get our breakfasts, what sleep we could, and be ready to march in two hours. Springfield, still thirty-five miles off, must be reached to night...

While making this march, Lyon's little army learned that General Sigel had defeated Jackson and the latter and his forces had taken flight. This rendered further forced marches unnecessary. The small army stopped. The men spent a day washing their clothes, cooking and eating, and resting. Camp Sigel, a few miles above Springfield, was set up and used for about a week. The army then moved on to Little York, on Pond Creek, ten miles southwest of Springfield. Here Lyon's forces were joined by a regiment of Kansas troops and several companies of regulars. It was at this time that six companies of the First Iowa were sent into Taney

County. The *Des Moines Valley Whig* of Keokuk reported in its issue of August 5:

**First Iowa Regiment.** Five companies of this Regiment led by Lieut. Col. Merritt, were in Gen. [Thomas W.] Sweeny's expedition to Forsyth, Taney county. They left Springfield on Saturday p.m., the 20th, marched seven miles and camped on the James Fork. On Sunday, in a terrible rain, they marched 10 miles over the Ozark hills—a country which Lieut. Gov. Reynolds said no army could penetrate. In passing through the town of Ozark, they took all the boots and shoes that could be found—the same being greatly needed by Gen. Sweeny's men. On Monday, wet and weary, they marched 28 miles to Forsyth over roads worse than any before passed. There was some skirmishing on the way, and as usual the rebels, who were not shot, ran away.

The regular cavalry under Capt. Stone, U.S.A., were the first to enter Forsyth. They charged furiously, but the rebels were too fleet for them, and got across to the opposite side of the White River.

The cavalry dismounted and pursued them as infantry. In the meanwhile Companies C and G, of the Iowa Volunteers, came up on the flank, but just too late. They only got sight of the fleeing rebels, who fired a few shots at them from the opposite hills, which were returned with uncertain effect.

A portion of the Iowa troops and the cavalry had entered the court house in the centre of the town when, by some mistake, three shells were fired into it by our artillery, one of which exploded, fortunately without seriously injuring any one . . .

With the Taney County expedition completed, the Iowans rejoined Lyon's forces. The General himself was expecting word of reinforcements

which would aid him in fighting the combined forces of Major Generals Sterling Price and McCulloch. The latter two were known to be on the Arkansas border and daily receiving reinforcements of men, arms, and artillery. It was understood they were preparing for an attack on Springfield and the destruction of Lyon's forces.

Edwin C. Bearss, National Park Service historian, in a two-part history of the Battle of Wilson's Creek written for the *Annals of Iowa* in 1961 (Vol. 36, No. 2, 81-109; No. 3, 161-186.), indicates the trouble General Lyon had in securing the reinforcements needed for a reasonable chance of victory. He wrote:

... Every day he visited his outposts and sent off pleas for assistance. At times, Lyon would lose his temper and curse and swear violently. Two prominent Union men of Greene County recalled one incident when Lyon received a dispatch from Major General John C. Fremont (Fremont, who, as Lyon's superior, commanded the Western Department, maintained his headquarters in St. Louis), stated that no more troops could or would be sent for the present. As the General strode back and forth in his room with the paper in his hand, he suddenly threw it on the table and, clapping his hands together, the general cried out "G-d D--n General Fremont: He is a worse enemy to me and the Union cause than Price and McCulloch and the whole d--n tribe of rebels in this part of the state."

On August 1, the Union forces from camps surrounding Springfield moved in the evening and came together the next morning at Wilson's

Creek, ten miles south of Springfield on the Fayetteville road. About five miles along this road the Union army came to Dug Springs where they met the advance guard of the Confederate troops under General McCulloch.

The *Des Moines Valley Whig* (Keokuk) in its issue of August 19, carried the news of this battle as reported in dispatches received from its correspondents:

*Springfield, Aug. 2.*

A battle occurred to-day at Dug Springs, 19 miles south of this place, between the forces under Gen. Lyon and the rebel troops under Ben McCulloch, in which 8 of the former were killed and 30 wounded, and 40 of the latter killed and 40 wounded. Gen. Lyon took eighty stand of arms and 15 horses and wagons. A squadron of 270 U. S. Cavalry made a charge upon a body of rebel infantry said to have been 4,000, cut their way through them and returned with a loss of only five men. The charge was most gallant and terrible, several of the rebels being found with their heads cloven through. The enemy retired during the night, and Gen. Lyon took possession of the field. Another battle was momentarily expected, the enemy being in large force west of Springfield. Particulars as soon as possible . . .

*St. Louis, Aug. 8.*

Additional particulars of the Dug Springs battle.—On Thursday news reached here that the enemy was advancing on us in three columns with a force numbering 20,000 men. Gen. Lyon immediately set out to meet them with the 2d and 3d Mo. Regiments . . . and the 1st and 2d Kansas and the 1st Iowa Regiments, with two or three companies of regular infantry and two or three companies of regular cavalry from Camp McClellan, about 19 miles west

of here. Lyon encamped that evening on Tyrel Creek, and on Friday advanced to Dug Springs, about 19 miles southwest of Springfield, where he obtained intelligence of the enemy. A fight took place between 4 and 6 o'clock, P.M. A party of 270 of Lyon's Cavalry, as previously reported, were crossing a ridge of high land, partially enclosed on the east by a valley, and when descending the hill came upon a large force of the enemy's infantry, variously estimated at from 2,000 to 4,000, and being unable to retreat, they charged and cut their way through with loss of five men. The Lieut. commanding the cavalry was killed after killing 8 of the rebels. Meantime the enemy appeared in large numbers moving along the valley, but were put to flight by our artillery. Our infantry was not engaged. The rebels retreated southward to a place called McCulloch's store, on Fayetteville road. Number of rebels found dead on field amounted to 40, and 44 wounded picked up . . .

After the Battle of Dug Springs, the Union forces returned to camp grounds in Springfield on August 4. O'Connor writes of the Iowans' encampment: "The First Iowa encamped on the farm of Major [Johns] Phelps, who was then in Washington at the extra session of Congress, his patriotic wife and daughter at home, with trunks packed and horses saddled, ready for any emergency, but rendering all the service in their power and making every sacrifice for the Union cause."

The Union troops lay on their arms, night and day, from their arrival until their departure for Wilson's Creek on the evening of August 9. Bearss tells of the departure from Springfield:

Shortly before sunrise, the bugles were blown and the drums beaten. The various units constituting the Army of the West fell in on their colors. Since the First Iowa was sleeping under the stars, they had no tents on which to form the regimental line. After the Iowans had been standing in line for a few minutes, General Lyon was seen approaching on his large iron-gray horse. He was accompanied by Major Schofield. Lyon, as he rode by, made a brief speech to each company. Private Eugene F. Ware, a member of the 1st Iowa, recalled, "We could not hear what he said to the companies on each side of us, owing to the distance apart of the companies and the low tone of his voice. Reining in his horse in front of Company E, Lyon announced:

"Men, we are going to have a fight. We will march out in a short time. Don't shoot until you get orders. Fire low—don't aim higher than their knees; wait until they get close; don't get scared; it's no part of a soldier's duty to get scared. . ."

Shortly after Lyon's visit, the ordnance wagons were driven up and ammunition distributed. The men of the 1st Iowa filled not only their cartridge-boxes but also the pockets of their breeches. Since the woolen shirts worn by Iowans had pockets, most of the soldiers likewise stuffed these pockets with ammunition. A wagon from the commissary department soon appeared on the scene. The soldiers were issued two days' rations of beef and pork, which they cooked immediately. . .

*Iowans At Wilson's Creek*

*(Editor's Note: No attempt has been made to report all the engagements in this battle. Only those participated in by Iowans have been given special attention.)*

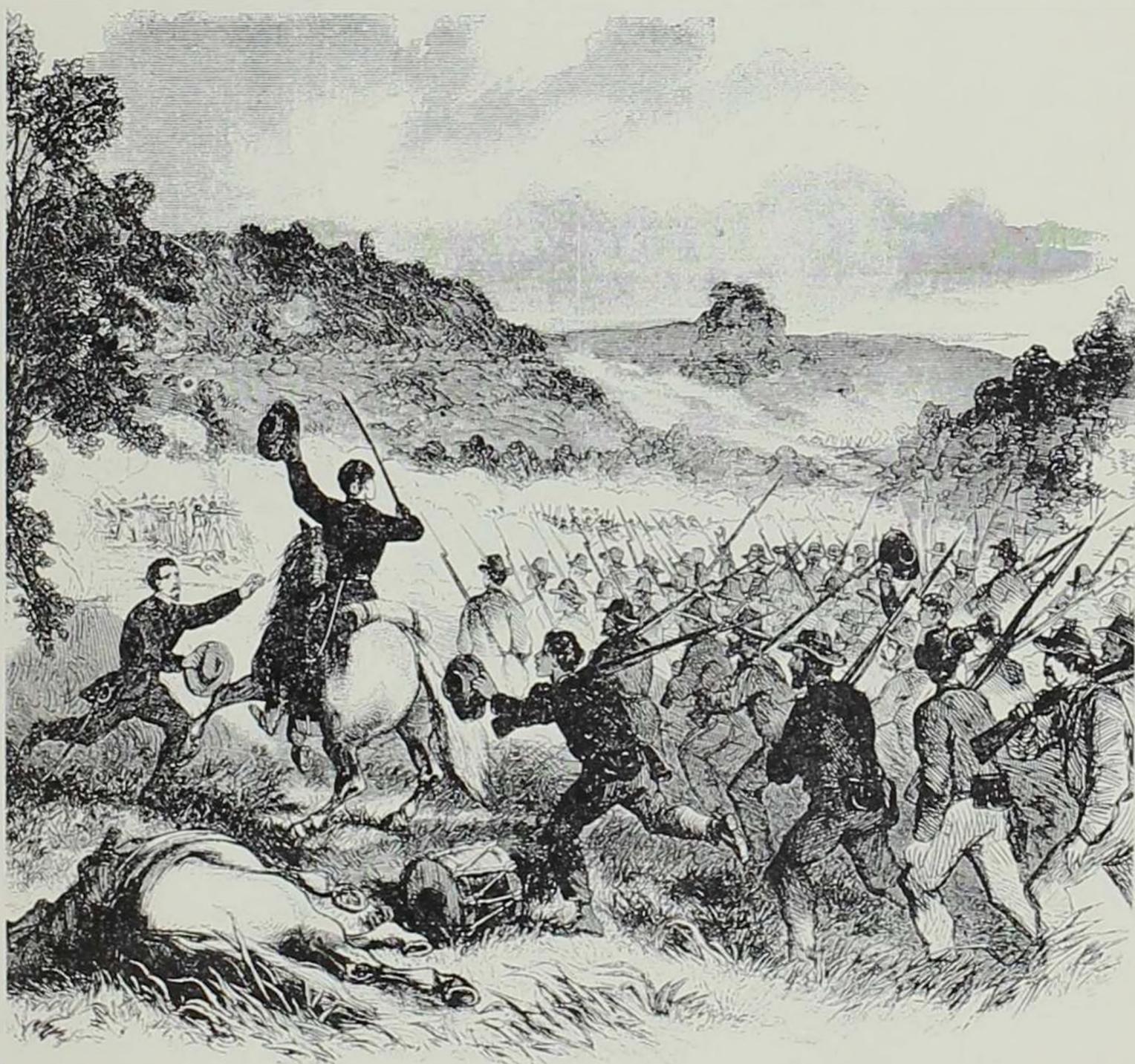
The Battle of Wilson's Creek was a bloody six-hour fight that took place in a heavily wooded area bordering the Creek. The First Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiment was one of the units taking part in this battle. Lieutenant Colonel William H. Merritt, Cedar Rapids, had assumed command of the Iowa regiment because of the illness of Colonel John F. Bates, Dubuque.

While it rained the evening of August 9, it did not deter Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon from following through with plans for a surprise attack on the Confederates already camped along Wilson's Creek. The rain, however, caused Generals Sterling Price and Ben McCulloch to drop their plans for a surprise march on Springfield.

When Lyon's troops began the march to Wilson's Creek at 6 o'clock, p.m., they departed in three columns: the left under Sigel; a small force under Major Samuel D. Sturgis, which joined Lyon's right wing when the battle started; and the general himself leading the main body of troops. The First Iowa was in the general's column, next-to-the-last unit in the march from Springfield. Lyon had informed Merritt that the Iowans would be held in reserve.

Arriving in the area of Wilson's Creek after

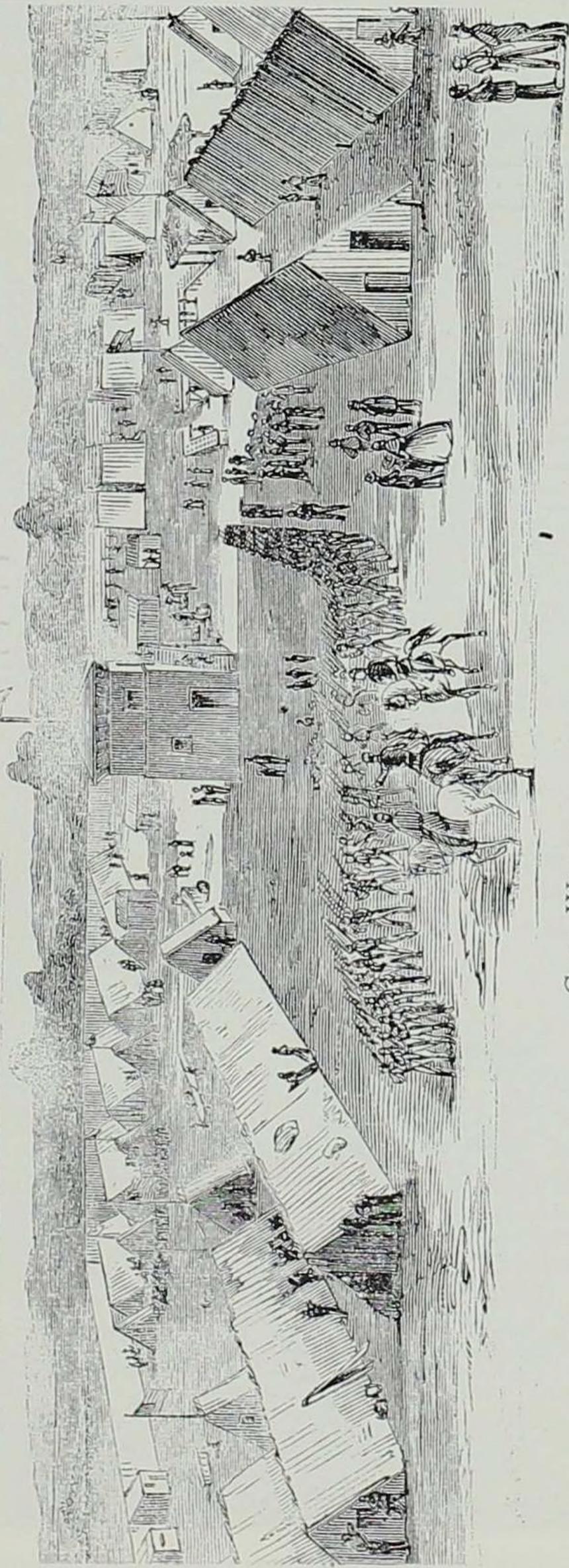
The following illustrations are reprinted from contemporary sources. Although the Civil War brought field photography into prominence, the average Iowan saw the war through the eyes of the artist.



Lyon's charge (compare color version)  
*Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, August 31, 1861



The road to Boonville  
*Harper's Weekly*, August 24, 1861

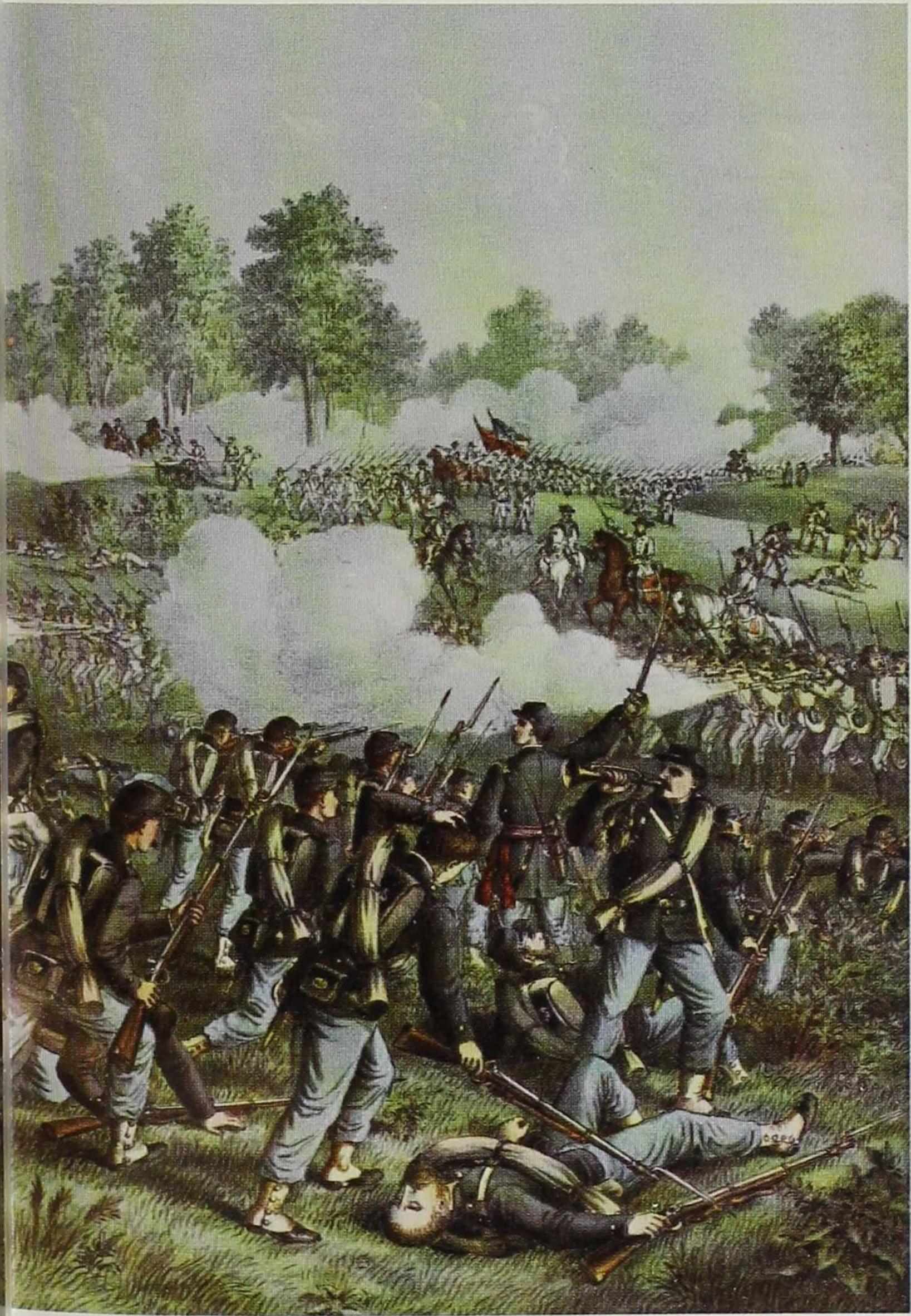


Camp Warren  
*Harper's Weekly*, August 24, 1861



A color lithograph version of Lyon's death copyrighted in 1893, from the collection of C. Armitage Harper.

BATTLE OF VICKSBURG



WILSON'S CREEK.



A color lithograph version of Lyon's death copyrighted in 1893, from the collection of C. Armitage Harper.

BATTLE OF WILSON'S CREEK.

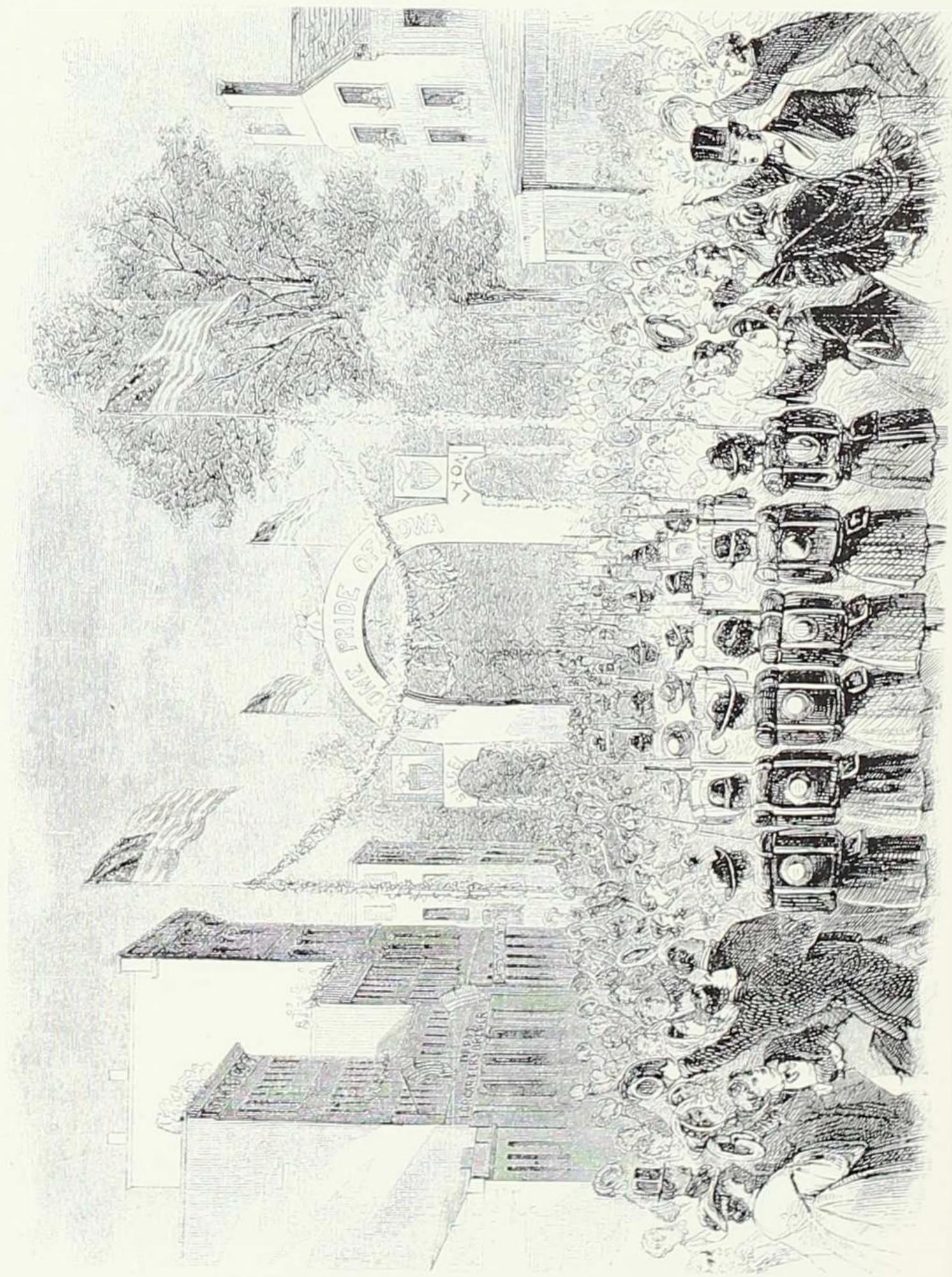




Lt. Sigel used Confederate prisoners to  
move his guns.  
*Harper's Weekly*, August 31, 1861



*Harper's Weekly*, August 31, 1861  
The statue of young Shelby Norman,  
the first Iowan to fall in the war, at  
the Soldier' and Sailors' Monument in  
Des Moines.



The First Iowa's return to Davenport  
*Harper's Weekly*, September 21, 1861

midnight, the men dropped in the high grass and got in a couple hours of sleep. As dawn approached, the Union forces moved out and shortly came into contact with the Confederate pickets, who fled as the Union forces came into view. The march had taken the rebels by surprise.

The first charge on what was to become known as "Bloody Hill," came at 5 o'clock a.m., with the First Kansas leading the way. Totten's battery, with the Iowans in support, was set up on this ridge, possibly the best position for an artillery battery on the field. It opened fire, the rebels were thrown into confusion, and little was heard of them for almost a half hour.

The Confederates rallied, and soon after 6 o'clock the action became general. O'Connor in his history of the First Iowa was fairly detailed in his writing. However, when describing the actions which were to follow, he needed only a few lines:

From this time till half-past eleven, any attempt at description would be useless. A rapid succession of charges and repulses; one continual roar of musketry and cannon which shook the buildings in Springfield, eight miles off; shells bursting, horses and men mangled, writhing and dying, all round; no water; thermometer ranging from 100° to 108°; but in all this, there was no shrinking. I never heard the word retreat mentioned, by man or officer during those seven hours. The First Iowa was in five separate charges or engagements, each of them in itself a battle, for we had to meet fresh troops every time, and always over double our number. About ten o'clock, being slightly wounded be-

fore that, and having two horses shot from under him, the brave, disinterested and patriotic Lyon, with hat in hand, waving the First Iowa and Second Kansas on to a charge, fell, mortally wounded. . .

Lyon had reformed his battle line on the crest of a small elevated plateau overlooking the thickly-wooded and underbrush-covered valley. He stationed the First Kansas on the left of the First Missouri and separated by some sixty yards because of a ravine. The First Iowa was positioned on the left of the Kansans.\*

To the rear of this line was Totten's artillery, placed opposite the interval between the First Kansas and the First Missouri. A provisional battery of three 6-pounders and one 12-pounder, under Lieutenant John V. DuBois, had been dueling with the Pulaski Arkansas Battery. Bearss records the Iowans' appearance with the DuBois battery:

Captain Frederick Steele's battalion of regulars was posted in support of DuBois' Battery. The 1st Iowa was drawn up in line of battle on the left of DuBois' guns. Two companies (D and E) of the 1st Iowa were deployed as skirmishers and thrown forward. Throughout the artillery duel, the Iowans grimly held their ground. Private Ware recalled:

Across . . . Wilson's Creek which was not very far, perhaps one-third of a mile, a battery [the Pulaski] made a specialty of our ranks, opening out thunderously. We all lay down on the ground, and for some time the shells, round shot and cannister were playing closely over our heads.

\*See the map on p. 6 of insert.

Our company [E] did not have much to do for a while in the way of shooting; we simply laid down on the ridge and watched the battery . . . [to our right], or sat up or kneeled down.

The duel was very interesting and our boys stayed close to the earth. Considerable damage was done to our artillery, but they were not silenced. . .

As another Confederate attack began, positions on the Union left were overrun. As the Kansans fell back, Confederate troops were seen moving to positions in front of the extreme left flank. Major J. M. Schofield, of Lyon's regular army staff, rode back to the First Iowa and ordered the regiment to follow him. Merritt sent the Burlington companies D (under First Lieutenant Mathias Keller) and E (under First Lieutenant John C. Abercrombie) forward as skirmishers. Beginning their advance and crossing over the crest of "Bloody Hill," the Iowans met the retreating Kansans who broke through the right flank of the First Iowa battle line. In this confusion, Companies A and F of the First Iowa became separated from the other eight companies.

Schofield personally led an attack of the remaining companies in a charge. They struck at the Confederates moving against the Union left. Fighting fiercely, they refused to give ground. They recovered the positions abandoned by the Kansans. They rallied promptly after each rebel counter-attack.

The *Des Moines Valley Whig* (Keokuk) on September 9, reprinted the pertinent details of Major Sturgis' official report of the battle. The First Iowa was mentioned several times:

... The battalion of regular infantry under Captain Steele, which had been detailed to the support of Lieutenant DuBois' battery, was during this time brought forward to the support of Captain Totten's battery. Scarcely had these dispositions been made when the enemy again appeared in very large force along our entire front, and moving towards each flank. The engagement at once became general, and almost inconceivably fierce, along the entire line, the enemy appearing in front often in three or four ranks, lying down, kneeling and standing, the lines often approaching to within thirty or forty yards of each other, as the enemy would charge upon Captain Totten's battery, and be driven back.

Early in the engagement, the First Iowa came to the support of the First Kansas and First Missouri, both of which had stood like veteran troops, exposed to a galling fire of the enemy...

Lyon sent orders to Merritt and the First Iowa to march to the assistance of the First Kansas. Before the orders reached Merritt, his regiment had been posted on the left of DuBois' battery. His shouted orders to fall back and regroup were lost in the tumult of the battle and only Companies A and F obeyed his instructions. Six companies of the First Iowa, B, C, G, H, I, and K, grimly held their positions and fired at the advancing southerners. Colonel Merritt accompanied Companies

A and F when they retired from the crest of "Bloody Hill."

Private Ware, a member of Company E and one of its skirmishers, described the battle:

On the edge of the meadow . . . was a low rail fence; the Rebels rallied under the shelter of it, and, as if by some inspiration or some immediate change of order, they broke it down in places and started for our artillery [Totten's Battery]. As they got nearer to us, their own artillery ceased firing, because it endangered them. When they got close the firing began on both sides. How long it lasted I do not know; it was probably 20 minutes. Every man was shooting as fast, on our side, as he could load, and yelling as loud as his breath would permit.

Most were on the ground, some on one knee. The foe stopped advancing. We had paper cartridges, and in loading we had to bite off the end, and every man had a big quid of paper in his mouth, from which down his chin ran the dissolved gunpowder. The other side [the Rebels] were yelling, and if any orders were given nobody heard them. Every man assumed the responsibility of doing as much shooting as he could.

Finally the field was so covered with smoke that not much could be known as to what was going on. The day was clear and hot. As the smoke grew denser, we stood up and kept inching forward, as we fired, and probably went forward in this way 25 yards. We noticed less noise in front of us, and only heard the occasional boom of a gun. The wind, a very light breeze, was in our favor, blowing very gently over us upon the foe. . .

A strong Confederate attack followed a silence of some twenty minutes. Then the rebels advanced with yells, cheers, and great volleys of firing. All

Union reserves were committed to the battle by General Lyon. The six Iowa companies manned the far left front, which was flanked by a deep ravine. The other four companies of the First Iowa were on the right, making an advance but staying near the artillery.

General Lyon was killed at 10 o'clock, a.m.

What regiment was General Lyon leading when killed? That question has fascinated many over the years. Some reports say he was leading the First Kansas, the First Iowa, or the Second Kansas; some couple the Iowans with either the First or Second Kansas. While several versions are given, the report of Edwin C. Bearss, National Park Service historian, is the authentic one because of his extensive research on the subject from original sources. He writes in part:

As some of the Iowans were being led back into the fray by a staff officer, they called out, "We have no leader. Give us a leader." . . . General Sweeny now rode up. Lyon, gesturing toward the Iowans, said, "Sweeny, lead those troops forward and we will make one more charge." . . . Pending the return of his aide, Lyon advanced a few steps and joined two companies of the 1st Iowa (A and F) which had been detailed to hold an exposed sector of the Federal main line of resistance . . . Mitchell led his cheering Kansans forward. The regiment advanced to the attack in column by platoons. When the head of the column passed Totten's battery, Lyon joined Colonel Mitchell. Swinging his hat, Lyon called out to the Kansans, "Come on, my brave boys," . . . "I will lead you; forward!"

After a short advance, the head of the column "raised the crest of the hill beyond the advanced [Totten's] battery." Here, it was ambushed. Among the soldiers cut down by this murderous fire were General Lyon and Colonel Mitchell. . .

Henry O'Connor, who wrote the history of the First Iowa nearly 111 years ago, took note of the discrepancy:

Permit me here to correct a not very material error into which the *New York Tribune* was first misled, and which, from the fact of its appearing in that paper, has obtained very general credit, viz: That General Lyon when he fell, was leading the First Kansas in a charge. The First Kansas was not then engaged. The regiment—or rather what was left of it, for it was decimated, and done as brave and bloody fighting as had ever been done by a regiment on any field,—had been brought out a few minutes before; and the General put himself at the head of six companies of the First Iowa, and all of the Second Kansas, which was originally only six hundred strong. . .

General Sturgis in his official report of the battle verified O'Connor's statement and also gave some of the details of the action which led to the General's death:

. . . Early in this engagement, while Gen. Lyon was leading his horse along the line on the left of Captain Totten's battery, and endeavoring to rally our troops which were at this time in considerable disorder, his horse was killed, and he received a wound in the leg and one in the head. . . I then dismounted one of my orderlies, and tendered the horse to the General, who at first declined, saying it was not necessary. The horse, however, was left with him and

I moved off to rally a portion of the Iowa regiment which was beginning to break in considerable numbers. . .

In the meantime, the General mounted, and swinging his hat in the air, called to the troops nearest him to follow. The Second Kansas gallantly rallied around him, headed by the brave Col. Mitchell. In a few moments the Colonel fell severely wounded; about the same time a fatal ball was lodged in the General's breast. . .

*Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (New York) of August 31 had another version:

We have taken occasion elsewhere to notice the gallantry of the 1st Regiment of Iowa Volunteers, at the battle of Wilson's Creek. . . It was in leading a charge of this regiment that General Lyon fell. Seeing a numerically overpowering body of rebels advancing to the attack, General Lyon rode up to the regiment, and exclaimed, "Wait, boys, until they are close, then fire, and charge with bayonets!" "Give us a leader," was the reply, "and we will follow to the death!" On came the enemy confident in his superior numbers. No time was to be lost. "I will lead you myself, my brave boys!" ejaculated Lyon and threw himself at their head, shouting, "*Make Ready! Fire! Charge!*" . . . A moment afterwards the brave Lyon fell dead in the arms of his gallant soldiers, who pressed on wildly to avenge his death, and drove the rebels in disorder from the field.

While Merritt was the senior officer present when General Lyon was killed, a regular army officer, Major Samuel D. Sturgis, assumed command. With Merritt in the defense of the front line and the flank were Companies B, C, G, H, I, and K. In a report of his activities that day, Merritt wrote that he had placed the companies in that

order. The companies under Major A. B. Porter stayed in their line position just ahead of the artillery. Momentarily the unit was overrun, and one gun was lost. Fighting back with clubs and bayonets, the Iowans retained their position.

About a half-hour after Lyon's death, Major Sturgis took command. At this time he said, "Our brave little army was scattered and broken." An undefeated Confederate force faced him from the front; Union troops had not been able to fill their canteens since leaving Springfield sixteen hours before; ammunition was running short; there were no reserves. The men were exhausted from six hours of fighting in this, one of the bloodiest battles ever fought on American soil.

After a conference of regimental officers, Sturgis gave the order to begin a retreat. Companies A, F, D, and E of the First Iowa, under Major Porter, along with the artillery and one company of regulars, covered the Union army's withdrawal. They fought off the final Confederate attack.

In his regimental report, Colonel Merritt reported that of the 959 enrolled, the First Iowa suffered thirteen killed in action, four missing, and 146 wounded. In the latter category, five mortally, and an additional seven died as the result of accident or illness. Of those killed, missing, or fatally wounded, the Muscatine companies lost eleven, including Alexander L. Mason, Captain of Company C; Des Moines County companies, none;

Dubuque companies, nine; Johnson County, four; Henry, Scott and Lynn Counties, one each.

The First Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiment left Springfield on August 11 and made the march to Rolla in eleven days. A longer route than usual had to be taken because the Gasconade River was extremely high and fordable at only certain points. At Rolla, the men found clothing provided for them by the state.

The Iowans left Rolla by rail and arrived in St. Louis on August 17. They were mustered out of service there on August 21—ten days after the expiration of their regular ninety-day enlistment period.

It is said that the Iowa companies, because of their admiration for General Lyon, voted to stay with him until such time as he no longer needed them.

Among the last references to the First Iowa one appeared in the *Des Moines Valley Whig* (Keokuk) on September 30:

**The Colors of the 1st Regiment.**—The colors of the 1st Iowa Regiment, borne by the gallant Hawkeye soldiers through Missouri and in the Springfield battle, were yesterday presented to Adj. Gen. Baker by Sergeant J. J. Norton, of Company C (Muscatine) of the 1st Regiment. It now waves from Gen. Baker's headquarters—a handsome silk flag, but somewhat faded. At the same time of the presentation of this flag, Sergeant Samuel V. Lambert, of the 1st Regiment, now in Company F, 2d cavalry, presented Gen. Baker with an ensign's belt, for carrying

standard, taken from a rebel in the Springfield battle. These gifts were appropriate gifts, and no doubt are properly appreciated by the receiver, whose office they now make *additionally* interesting (Reprinted from the *Davenport Gazette*.)

### *In Retrospect*

Long considered the "bloodiest battle of the west," the Battle of Wilson's Creek was fought some 111 years ago. At that time it was considered a Confederate victory. The Federal army had been beaten in the field; its commander, General Nathaniel Lyon, killed.

But it was a hollow victory. The Confederates were unable to follow up their victory because their supply train of several hundred wagons had been burned and more than 5,000 of their horses had been killed, wounded, or scattered. In securing victory, the Confederates had been so crippled that they could not move after the retreating Union troops. Instead General Ben McCulloch took his army back to Arkansas. Except for a few minor raids, this army did not again venture into Missouri. General Sterling Price and his State Guard moved north but, ultimately, rejoined McCulloch in time to take part in the Battle of Pea Ridge in Arkansas.

The Confederate army of some 11,000 men had been manhandled by the Union army of 5,400 until the final hour of the engagement. Figures show that the Confederates suffered losses of 1,230 and

the North, 1,317. The Union forces lost twenty-four per cent of their personnel engaged; the Confederates, twelve per cent. The losses on "Bloody Hill" alone were twenty-five per cent of the combatants involved. No other battle in the Civil War suffered a higher percentage of over-all losses, considering the number of troops involved and the duration of the battle.

The battle today is recognized as one of the more significant if not one of the more decisive battles of the Civil War. Certainly it saved Missouri for the Union. Because of its war resources and its strategic location, on two of the nation's important interior waterways—the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers—Missouri was of prime importance to the Confederates. In the end its loss was fatal to the southern cause.

Missouri with its vast resources of food, minerals, industry, and manpower would have served the Confederacy well. But because of Wilson's Creek and General Nathaniel Lyon, it was saved for the Union. Though he died, not knowing he had achieved his purpose, Lyon held Missouri in the Union. His stand strengthened the hand of the Federals in Kentucky, and they were successful in keeping most of that state loyal.

If Missouri and Kentucky had seceded, the southern cause would have received a great boost.

### *First Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiment*

The following table shows the field and staff officers, as well as the elected company officers of the First Iowa:

#### **Field and Staff Officers**

Colonel—John F. Bates	Chaplain—I. Q. Fuller
Lt. Col.—W. H. Merritt	Sgt. Major—C. E. Compton
Major—Asbury B. Porter	Q. Sgt.—William H. Hughes
Surgeon—William H. White	Drum Major—T. W. Cummings
Ass. Surgeon—H. Reichenbach	Fife Major—H. W. Kilmartin
Adjutant—G. W. Waldron	Hosp. Steward—Samuel Holmes
Quartermaster—Theo. Guelich	

#### **Company Officers**

<i>County</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>Captains</i>	<i>Lieutenants</i>
Muscatine	A	Markoe Cummins	Benjamin Beach Geo. A. Satterlee
Muscatine	C	Alex L. Mason	William Purcell William Davis
Johnson	B	Bradley Mahanna	Harvey Graham Andrew J. Ridus
Des Moines	D	C. L. Matthias	Mathias Keller Joseph Enderle
Des Moines	E	Geo. F. Streaper	J. C. Abercrombe George W. Pierson
Henry	F	Samuel M. Wise	George A. Stone S. F. Roderick
Scott	G	Augustus Wentz	Theodore Guelich Johannes Ohlefeldt
Dubuque	H	Fred. Gottschalk	Jacob Duttle Joseph Geiger
Dubuque	I	Frank J. Herron	William J. Clark Geo. W. Waldron
Linn	K	Thomas Z. Cook	John C. Marven Geo. W. Stinson

*Iowa Heroes of Wilson's Creek*

A 17-year-old private in Company A, Shelby Norman, was the first Iowan killed in the Battle of Wilson's Creek. Death came as he approached the field of battle. A bronze statue of Norman can be seen on the Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in Des Moines.

Nicholas Boquet, a 19-year-old from Burlington, was the first Iowan cited for the Congressional Medal of Honor. He dashed, under heavy fire, to an area between the lines and captured a riderless horse, hitched it to a disabled gun, saving it from capture.

Francis J. Herron, who was to be cited for the Medal of Honor at Pea Ridge, left the army as a major general.

Charles L. Matthias, Burlington, was mustered out of service as a brigadier general.

George A. Stone, Mount Pleasant, left the army as a brevet brigadier general.

After expiration of their volunteer service, more than one-third of the First Iowa troopers enlisted in the regular army.

#### A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

The name L. O. Cheever is well known to regular readers of *The Palimpsest*. From 1965 until his retirement July 1, 1972, he was Associate Editor of this publication. Last summer Cheever, a widower, moved to Missouri to be near his two daughters.

This unassuming man has had an unusual Iowa background. While he was a boy living near Nevada, Iowa, his father deserted his mother and three other children. Unable to hold the family together, Mrs. Cheever committed Larry and his younger brother to the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home. (Founded during the Civil War, this institution later became known as Iowa Annie Wittenmyer Home.) Here a librarian noticed and encouraged Larry's interest in books. He developed an early interest in the American Civil War.

In a round about way it was also because of Larry's infatuation with books that an Ottumwa physician and his wife, Dr. and Mrs. D. E. Graham, gave Cheever "a home, love and education." After completing high school at Ottumwa, Larry graduated from Ripon College, then went on to earn a Master's degree in Library Science from Columbia University. From 1935 to 1965 he edited a magazine for John Morrell and Co., first at Ottumwa and later at Chicago.

Through the years Cheever has been an avid collector of books. He has presented valuable collections to such institutions as Ripon College, the State Historical Society, and the University of Iowa Library. Recently he gave to the latter institution a complete collection of Carroll Coleman's Prairie Press publications.

At the close of the June 1967 *Palimpsest* which he wrote on "Iowa Annie Wittenmyer Home," Cheever expressed his gratitude to the State: "Thank you, Iowa." Iowans might well respond in kind, "Thank you, L. O. Cheever."

The State Historical Society encourages submission of articles on the history of Iowa and the surrounding region which may be of interest to the general reading public. The originality and significance of an article, as well as the quality of an author's research and writing, will determine acceptance for publication. A brief biographical sketch should be submitted. All manuscripts must be double-spaced on at least medium weight paper. As far as possible, citations should be worked into the body of the text. In this and other matters of form THE MLA STYLE SHEET is the standard guide. Black and white and colored illustrations are an integral part of THE PALIMPSEST. Any photographic illustrations should accompany the manuscript, preferably five-by-seven or eight-by-ten glossy prints, unmarked on either side. Inquiries and correspondence should be sent to: Editor, State Historical Society of Iowa, Centennial Building, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

