

Iuka and Corinth

For three weeks after the battle of Shiloh, the Union army remained in camp at Pittsburg Landing, drilling, replacing their equipment, and preparing for the advance on Corinth. General John Pope had captured Island No. 10 in the Mississippi on the day after Shiloh, thus clearing another segment of the river. With him were the 5th and 10th Iowa Infantry, the 2nd Cavalry, and the 2nd Artillery. Halleck, who had come from St. Louis to organize the advance, now ordered Pope to join him at Pittsburg, and on May 1 the advance on Beauregard at Corinth began.

The troops moved slowly, hampered by wet weather and bad roads, and by Halleck's order to intrench every position. Grant had been criticized for his failure to intrench at Shiloh; Halleck, the engineer, did not intend to make the same mistake. After ten days of siege, the Union troops found Corinth evacuated on the morning of May 30; Beauregard had given Halleck the slip.

All of the Iowa regiments that had fought at Shiloh were in the advance on Corinth, plus the cavalry and infantry that had been with Pope at Island No. 10, and the 17th Iowa, fresh from training at Benton Barracks. The remnants of the

8th, 12th, and 14th Iowa, and 58th Illinois — those not captured with their regiments at Shiloh — had been combined into what was known as the "Union Brigade."

The splendid army that "could have gone where it pleased," according to Sherman, was now dissipated. In July, Halleck was called to Washington to become general-in-chief, and Grant assumed command in the West. The Army of the Ohio had been sent eastward toward Chattanooga, together with two divisions of the Army of the Mississippi. Thus Grant was left to hold West Tennessee with the Army of the Tennessee and the remaining two divisions of the Army of the Mississippi. Van Dorn and Price began to assemble their forces to attack Grant's thin line, which stretched from Memphis to Corinth.

Sherman held the right at Memphis; General E. O. C. Ord the center at Grand Junction, with reserves at Bolivar to the north; and Major General William S. Rosecrans the left at Corinth. Small detachments were stationed at outposts along this line, and on September 13 Price took Iuka, one of these outposts some twenty miles east of Corinth. Grant immediately pulled as many of his troops together as possible and sent them against Price. Ord was to attack from the north, Rosecrans from the south.

When Rosecrans' two divisions approached Iuka, two hours before dark on September 19,

they were hit by Price's men, who had come out to meet the attacking force. Officially known as an "engagement," the fight at Iuka was a violent one, and to the men who struggled there, very much a "battle." The Iowa regiments in the front line — the 5th, 10th, and 16th — distinguished themselves. Only the 17th did not do well. In their first battle, with their colonel injured, their lieutenant colonel and major absent, and command falling to the captains, the regiment panicked.

When darkness fell, Rosecrans' two divisions had lost 790 killed, wounded, and captured. An indication of the role of the Iowa regiments at Iuka is that 45 per cent of the casualties that day were Iowans: 55 killed, 280 wounded, and 19 missing, for a total of 354.

In his report of the battle, Rosecrans mentioned especially the 5th Iowa, which "under its brave colonel (Matthies) withstood the storm of triple fire and triple numbers." Two months later Colonel Matthies was made a brigadier general. The 5th, on the right of the battle, received the brunt of the enemy's attack, fought back repeated assaults, and lost 37 men killed, 179 wounded, and one missing.

On the morning of the 20th, Rosecrans prepared to resume the attack, and Ord, who had not heard the sounds of battle the day before because of adverse winds, hurried forward to his aid. But the wily Price had escaped during the night, and

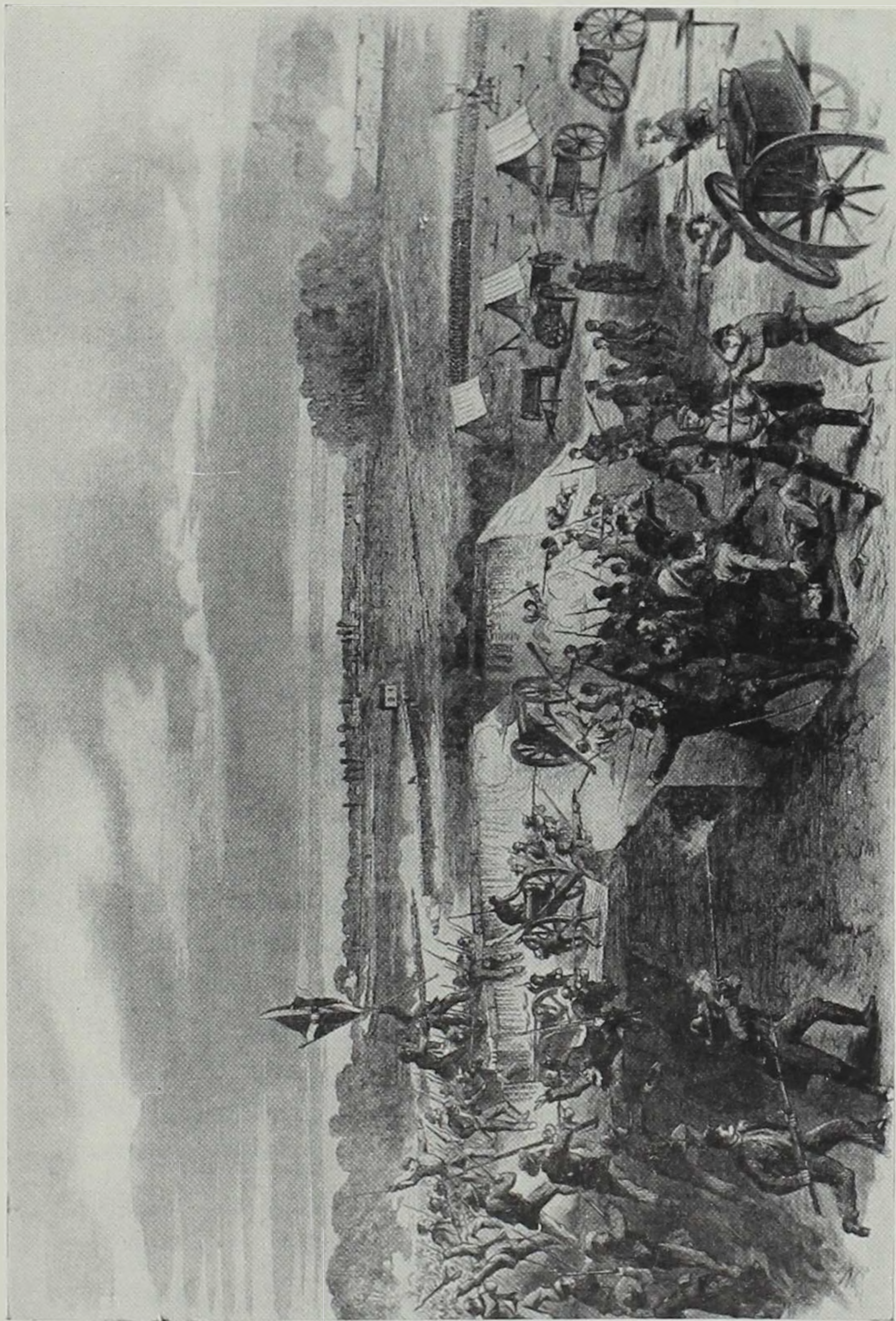
Iuka was occupied by the Union troops without further bloodshed.

Grant knew now that the next blow on his thin line would be at Corinth. Therefore, he began massing his troops there for the expected blow, which came on October 3. Ten Iowa infantry regiments were at Corinth — the Union Brigade, the 2nd, 5th, 7th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 15th, 16th, and 17th — together with the 2nd Artillery and the 2nd Cavalry.

The two-day battle of Corinth, October 3-4, 1862, was one of the most violent of the war. Grant had only 25,000 men to protect forts large enough for an army of 100,000. Van Dorn and Price had united, southwest of Corinth, and had marched north then turned eastward. Rosecrans' division was stationed in a semicircle to the west, north, and northeast of the town.

Corinth was surrounded by six outer batteries, named "A" to "F," and by seven inner batteries or forts, named Powell, Robinett, Williams, Phillips, Tannrath, Lothrop, and Madison. The Confederates' violent assaults on October 3, beginning about 10 o'clock in the morning, drove the Union troops gradually from the front line of batteries and breastworks, and by nightfall they had fallen back to the protection of the forts.

On the second day, the Confederates made a strong assault on Fort Robinett, managing to mount their flag on the battery for a few moments,



The Battle of Corinth — Storming Battery Robinett
Harper's Weekly, November 1, 1862

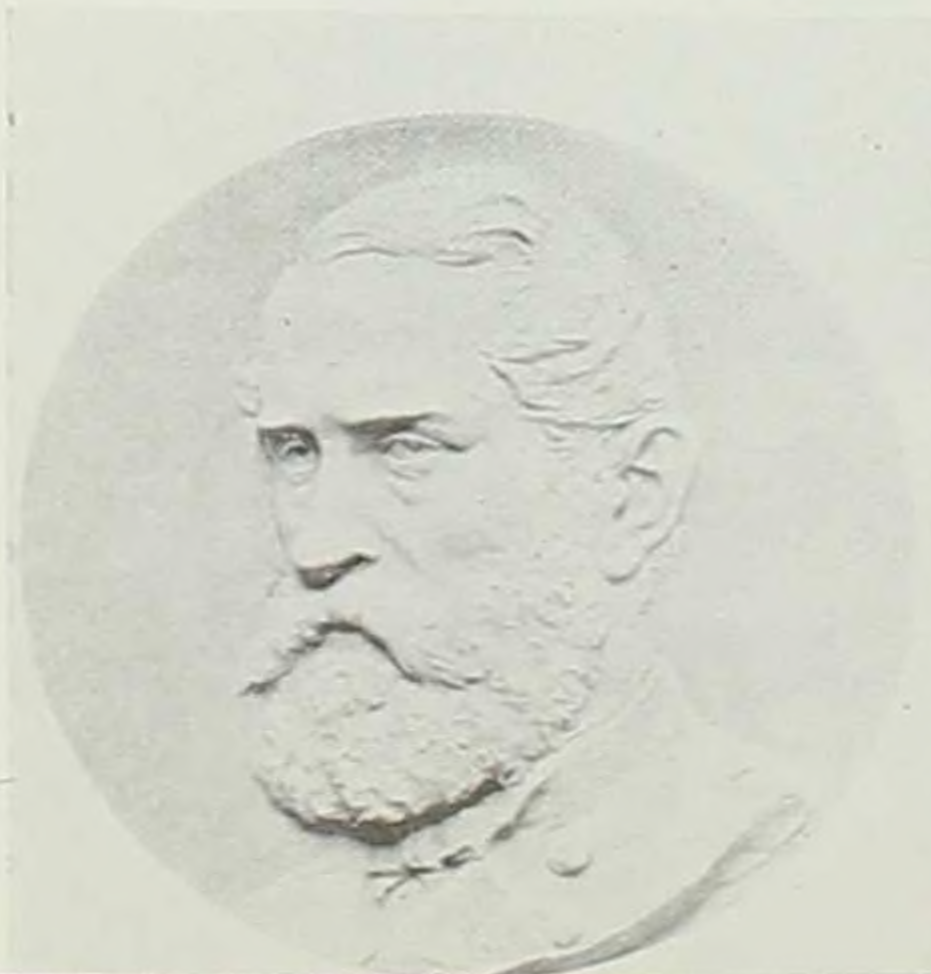
but they were driven back with great loss. This seemed to turn the tide; the Confederates gradually retired, and the battle of Corinth was over.

The Union suffered 2,500 casualties at Corinth, of which 531 were Iowans: 58 killed, 417 wounded, and 56 missing. The 2nd Iowa lost their colonel, James Baker of Bloomfield, and their lieutenant colonel, Noah W. Mills of Des Moines, both mortally wounded. Major James B. Weaver of Bloomfield commanded the 2nd Iowa thereafter as its colonel.

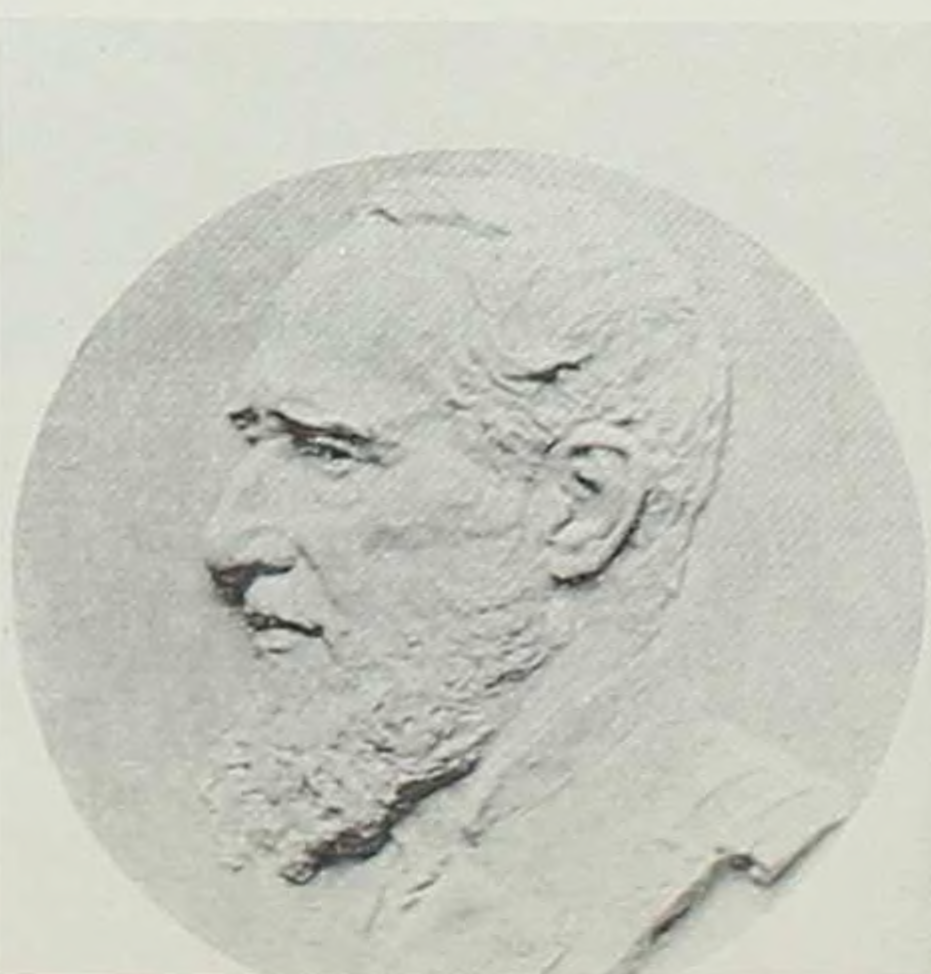
All the other Iowa regiments lost heavily except the 5th, held mostly in the reserve during the battle. The 17th, commanded temporarily by Major Jabez Banbury of the 5th Iowa, more than made up for its confusion and subsequent censure at Iuka by standing firmly to its guns and making several charges which resulted in the capture of prisoners and an enemy flag.

General Rosecrans issued a special order, honoring the 17th, which "by its gallantry in the battle of Corinth . . . charging the enemy and capturing the flag of the Fortieth Mississippi, has amply atoned for its misfortune at Iuka, and stands among the honored regiments."

CHARLES L. MATTHIES



WILLIAM VANDEVER



JAMES B. WEAVER

