

An Incident of the Civil War

On April 6, 1862, the first great battle of the Civil War in the West was fought at Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, afterward known as the battle of Shiloh. The Federal armies after disembarking at Pittsburg Landing formed their lines of battle in a semi-circle facing south and southwest, as the only foe they were likely to encounter was the Confederate troops at Corinth more than twenty-five miles away. General Benjamin M. Prentiss's division was placed at the extreme left end of the line and faced nearly south. The brigade in which the Fourteenth Iowa Infantry was a unit, afterward known as the Hornets Nest brigade, occupied a central position in the division line. Company I, of the Fourteenth Iowa, largely recruited from Mount Pleasant, Salem, Hillsboro, and adjacent communities, was posted in a thick clump of timber through which ran a wagon road. Travel and erosion had worn the soil down so that the bottom of the road was much lower than the surrounding land. The Iowans were armed with old-fashioned, muzzle-loading muskets with steel ramrods.

Albert S. Johnston, who commanded the Con-

federate Army at Corinth, learning of the intention of the Federal Army to cross the Tennessee River at Pittsburg Landing and march upon Corinth, decided not to await the arrival of the Federals at Corinth, but made a hurried march toward Pittsburg Landing with the intent of surprising the Union forces and overwhelming them before they could be well organized. Early on the morning of the sixth of April, the Confederates opened their attack upon the Federal forces in two lines several hundred feet apart. General Prentiss's division was the first to feel the shock of battle.

The Fourteenth Iowa, lying in the sunken road, was ordered not to fire until the enemy was within thirty paces. When, at last, the Iowans opened fire, the volley entirely destroyed the first line of the Confederates. But the enemy was not halted. Hurriedly the men began reloading to meet the shock of the second advancing line. In his excitement, Private Joshua Campbell of Glasgow in Company I forgot to remove the ramrod from his musket and, leveling his gun at the enemy, fired ramrod and all. As the rod shot out, small end first, instead of going straight at the enemy, it took a slant upward and the little end was driven several inches into an oak tree about twenty feet from the ground. The heavy end swung around,

bending the ramrod almost double. John E. Mitchell of Keokuk and Corporal Milton Rhodes lay beside Campbell in the sunken road and saw him fire his ramrod into the oak tree. The Hornets Nest brigade and the Fourteenth Iowa held this position throughout the day, but lost contact with the rest of the division. Toward evening, it was found that both wings of the Federal Army had been driven back and that the Confederates were in strong force between the Iowans and the river and the rest of the army. It seemed useless to make any further sacrifice of human life and so the troops surrendered as prisoners of war.

Fifty years after the battle, John E. Mitchell and Milton Rhodes, while attending a soldiers' reunion on the battlefield of Shiloh, went to the location of Company I in the sunken road and, looking up into the trees, saw the ramrod that Joshua Campbell had fired fifty years before, still sticking in the tree. Perhaps no one had discovered it, but, if so, had refrained from removing it.

In July, 1929, when I visited the battlefield of Shiloh, our guide pointed out the location of the Hornets Nest and the sunken road. I asked the guide if anything was known of a ramrod that had been fired into an oak tree in that locality. He replied that the ramrod had been found. The tree had died, but a section of the trunk containing

the ramrod had been cut out and kept by the curator of the battlefield. I visited the museum and there saw the ramrod just as the tree had preserved it for sixty-seven years.

Joshua Campbell has long since passed away. His body lies buried in the lonely Leambert cemetery northwest of Salem and he has been forgotten by the community, but the ramrod which, in his haste, he fired at the enemy, remains as a fitting memorial of his military service.

O. A. GARRETSON