

3rd Iowa Infantry

President Lincoln's proclamation on April 15, 1861, that an insurrection had begun against the authority of the United States government and his call for volunteers had resulted in setting quotas for the states. Iowa's quota for only one regiment was filled rapidly, but in late April, Jesse Bowen, Adjutant General of the Iowa Militia, was already anticipating a call for additional volunteers.ⁱ On May 3, the president made a second call for volunteers which cleared the way for the 2nd and 3rd Iowa Infantry regiments that were already forming to be mustered into service. Most of the companies that were mustered into the 3rd Iowa Infantry early in June had been in Keokuk several weeks waiting for the army bureaucratic machinery to process Lincoln's May 3 proclamation. Like the first two regiments, the 3rd Iowa Infantry was composed in part of local militia companies that had formed either before the war for purposes of local defense or immediately after the outbreak of war. Dubuque's Washington Guards became Company A, the Butler County Guards became Company I, and the Pioneer Grays of Cedar Falls became Company K.ⁱⁱ

The experiences of the 3rd Iowa Infantry would turn out very differently from those of the first two regiments. Unlike the 1st Iowa, the 3rd Iowa would serve throughout the war. Unlike the 2nd Iowa (and virtually all of Iowa's other volunteer infantry and cavalry regiments and artillery companies), the 3rd Iowa would not serve intact until the end of the war. The division of the regiment for purposes of different assignments plus extremely high casualties, deaths from disease, discharges for wounds and disease, and low re-enlistments in 1864 resulted in its reduction to only three companies. These remaining companies were then integrated into the 2nd Iowa Infantry in the late summer

of 1864 to form the 2nd and 3rd Veteran Infantry Consolidated Regiment, so the 3rd Iowa never lost its identity completely.ⁱⁱⁱ Its first commander was Colonel Nelson G. Williams of Dubuque County. In November, 1862, he was succeeded in command by Colonel Aaron Brown.

The 3rd Iowa Infantry's first major battle was at Blue Mills Landing, a short distance from Kansas City, on September 17, 1861. General John C. Fremont had been appointed by President Lincoln to take charge of the military pacification of Missouri which was deeply divided politically on the issue of secession and suffering from considerable civil disorders. Western Missouri in particular was in turmoil and controversial measures were eventually taken against the civilian population in dealing with rebels and outlaws. The 3rd Iowa had traveled from Keokuk down into Missouri and then west across the state. The regiment was with other Union forces that had reached Cameron, about fifty miles north of Kansas City and then turned and marched toward Kansas City, proceeding through the town of Liberty along the way. They were to link up with the 16th Illinois Infantry at Liberty and then proceed to Blue Mills Landing to intercept the rebels, but the rendezvous did not occur as planned. The fighting that occurred did not go off well for the Union forces, and the 3rd Iowa Infantry sustained heavy casualties. More than forty years later, Private Robert Garden of Company B would remember several problems, especially that of similar uniforms and underestimation of the enemy:

But the chief objection to it (the uniforms) was the color, as it was the same as that adopted by the enemy. After the battle of Blue Mills, it was condemned, and orders were issued against wearing it...We were now to learn that soldiering had some higher realities than guard duty, drill and pilot bread. We began to realize that our predictions of the total defeat of the Rebel Cause in Missouri had been the wildest mistake, and that it

was folly in wartimes to make any predictions whatever. We were to learn what it was to see the enemy, and to be shot at by him.^{iv}

After this engagement, Sergeant James Lakin of Company F was cited for gallantry in bearing the colors.^v

The 3rd Iowa Infantry was also one of eleven Iowa regiments that fought at the Battle of Shiloh, April 6-7, 1862. Whereas Blue Mills Landing was a sobering experience for 3rd Iowa Infantry following the exhilaration from the outbreak of war, the Battle of Shiloh turned out to be a sobering experience for the entire nation. On the first day, the regiment was caught in a situation in which its brigade had to retreat twice under heavy fire to avoid Confederate flanking movements. Colonel Williams was disabled when his horse was shot from under him, and Major Stone (later governor of Iowa) was wounded and taken prisoner. Command of the regiment fell to Lieutenant (later Major) George Crosley of Company E who led the regiment to the rear and rejoined its brigade from which it had been separated because of the severity of the fighting. The following day the regiment fought through to the end of the day as Union arms began to drive the Confederates back. Sergeant Lakin again carried the colors along with Corporal Anderson Edwards of Company I.^{vi} A few days after the battle, Crosley wrote a letter to his wife, Edna, describing both the thrill and terror of battle:

Our heavy guns would belch forth a blazing stream of fire and the tremendous reports would shake the ground like an earthquake and the forest around was lighted up with the blazing of the guns as they belched forth death and destruction. Many shells struck and exploded near me, solid shot came tearing through the trees above our heads, cutting off limbs and hurling them down to the ground. Men fell around me almost every moment, but I had got used to this and could stand and witness the terrific scene with calmness and composure, only waiting for the order to advance.^{vii}

In startling contrast, as silence descended on the field of battle the following day, Sergeant Seymour Thompson of Company F surveyed the scene:

During the afternoon, I yielded to curiosity, and with some comrades took a stroll over the field...the dead were everywhere to be found. Upon the crests of certain hills, in camps and in open fields they lay more thickly than elsewhere...Nowhere did the enemy's dead lay so thickly as on the open field behind which the First Brigade of the Fourth Division (the 3rd Iowa's brigade) had fought...

The dead presented every possible appearance. Some of them looked calm and natural as if taking a quiet sleep; not a mark of any emotion: not a distorted line in their features...Other countenances exhibited traces of rage; others of fear...Many were shot in the face...Many were shot in the chest and abdomen. Their bodies were swelled enormously, and a watery liquid bubbled and gurgled from their wounds. Some of their eyes were closed. Others lay on their backs, staring an unearthly stare, as though the light of a strange world were breaking on them.^{viii}

During the spring and summer of 1862, the 3rd Iowa Infantry was assigned to the area near Corinth, Mississippi, where General Grant was conducting siege operations.

The Confederates evacuated Corinth on May 30 but attempted to retake the city in early October. The result was a Union triumph on October 4 with the 3rd Iowa actively engaged. The next day the regiment distinguished itself in the Battle of the Hatchie when Captain Matthew Trumbull of Company I led the regiment over a bridge on the Hatchie River under heavy fire, formed a line of battle and charged up a steep hill, driving the enemy from their position.^{ix}

The following year the 3rd Iowa Infantry participated in the siege of Vicksburg. They went down the Mississippi on board the steamer *Crescent City* in May and received a typical greeting from rebels on the river banks. They lobbed artillery shells at the *Crescent City* which was leading a whole fleet of Union troops into the Vicksburg area. The men of the 3rd Iowa immediately manned the only artillery piece on board but were able to drive the rebels off the shore. The ship was badly damaged though, and fourteen men were wounded in the exchange. One unidentified man from the regiment wrote a letter home that was published in the *Cedar Falls Gazette* just before the Confederate capitulation. He vividly described the everyday life of the men during the siege and also

a curious phenomenon which occurred over and over during the war in which troops who were killing each other in deadly earnest would suddenly cross over the lines to talk and socialize with each other and then return to their respective sides and begin the slaughter again.

Our labor has been almost terrible. We were out five days and nights out of six, either supporting batteries or laying in rifle pits. The latter work taxes all the strength and endurance a man has. He is in a little hole with generally no shade, and there he must stay from daylight until dark. If he gets up he has the assurance that at least half a dozen mini balls will come singing by his head...All day long under a broiling sun we pickets blazed away at each other until about 4 P.M. by which time our ammunition was getting low, so we concluded to go talking with each other. The upshot of the affair was, that about 80 on a side of us, concluded to hold a party; so we went out and met each other half way between the lines and had a general good time...The regiment we met was the 59th Tennessee. We carried over coffee to them and they supplied our boys with tobacco. We concluded that the 59th were 'bully good boys,' and they 'do' of the 3rd Iowa.^x

After which the carnage continued until the Confederate surrender of the city on July 4.

Sergeant Thompson looked through a field glass at about 8 A.M. and saw the Confederates on a distant hill take down their flag and raise a white one. As they continued hoisting a series of white flags, the men of the 3rd Iowa sang patriotic songs along with other Union soldiers while the Confederates listened in gloomy silence. Then another flood of comradeship broke out again as the rebel troops walked into the Union lines. Thompson observed that "they mingled together, victor and vanquished—smoked, played cards, and over pots of hot coffee, discussed the war and related their adventures, like old comrades who, after a long absence, had just met."^{xi}

A few weeks later the 3rd Iowa embarked for Jackson, the capitol city of Mississippi, with General Sherman in hot pursuit of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston and his troops. The Union troops had high hopes for this new adventure, but Johnston was well entrenched in works on the south end of the city and repulsed

Sherman's troops. The 3rd Iowa suffered severe casualties, losing 114 men that day.

Colonel Brown was severely injured and that evening barely a singly company of men answered to roll call. A half century later, Logan wrote of the 3rd Iowa Infantry's trauma at Jackson and compared it to the charge of the Light Brigade.^{xii} Private Garden described the scene of slaughter:

The enemy opened with fourteen pieces of artillery and two brigades of infantry rose from their concealment and poured a converging fire upon us. Then the order was given to charge. The brigade raised the shout and sprang forward over the open field, climbing through and over the abattis into that thick storm of death, of grape and canister and musketry. A few moments and all was over. The line crumbled into broken bands...and then staggered and were swept away. Those who escaped had scarcely time to note who had fallen.

Our regiment had saved both flag and banner, and now of the two hundred and ten of the Third Iowa, who had advanced in the charge, but ninety could be rallied around them. It was a massacre of the Third Iowa. Our dead and wounded were left in a scorching sun on the battlefield. No appeal by flag of truce could induce the enemy to permit us to care for our hero comrades, lying there bleeding and perishing of thirst in that burning sun. The casualties of this affair were deplorable.^{xiii}

After returning to Vicksburg, the 3rd Iowa was sent to Natchez to rest and recuperate for several months. By the time the regiment was ready to reactivate, the end of its 3-year enlistment period was looming. Only two hundred men re-enlisted, but this represented three-fourths of all the able-bodied men in the regiment, a sad commentary on the effects of three years of war on the 3rd Iowa Infantry. Yet its worst days were still to come.

Early in the spring of 1864, the regiment formed part of Sherman's Meridian expedition, which was a general raid through Mississippi east of Jackson toward Meridian near the Alabama state line, which was a forerunner of his later famous March to the Sea. After its conclusion, the non-veteran portion of the regiment (the original 3-year enlistment had not quite run out) was sent on the ill-fated Red River Expedition

under General Nathaniel Banks and the regiment was never re-united. The remainder of the regiment, now the 3rd Iowa Veteran Infantry, joined General Sherman's forces in northwest Georgia to start the Atlanta campaign. It was then re-formed into an infantry battalion of three companies and designated as companies A, B, and C of the 3rd Iowa Veteran Infantry. On July 22, during a frontal assault against Atlanta, the 3rd Iowa suffered its final agony as a clearly identifiable military unit. A considerable portion of the regiment was killed, wounded, or captured including its new commander, Jacob Abernethy, recently promoted from lieutenant to lieutenant colonel. Its long-time color bearer, Robert Griffith, who had carried the colors at Shiloh and the sieges of Corinth, Vicksburg, and Jackson, was killed with five bullet wounds.

Two separate and seemingly conflicting accounts have been written on the fate of the colors of the 3rd Iowa at Atlanta that day. According to Private Garden, there was a desperate fight for the colors, but the men who were not able to get out of a rebel encirclement surrendered with the flag. Another story relates that the captured members of the 3rd Iowa were being marched through Atlanta where they cheered and sang "Rally Round the Flag" every time a shell burst in the streets. A rebel officer tried unsuccessfully to silence them and then a memorable scene followed.

A squad of Rebel cavalry was passing through the street with a flag of the Iowa Third captured after the color-bearer fell pierced with bullets. Some members of the regiment who were prisoners saw it, and making a rush upon its captors, wrested it from them, and amid threats and curses tore it into pieces. Unarmed by the enemy, unflinching in courage and patriotism to the end, the last heroic remnant of the veteran Third thus closed its long record of glorious battle.^{xiv}

Both stories could possibly be true about the same flag, but this is not likely. The passage above simply refers to "a flag of the Iowa Third." Whichever flag it was, it is probably lost to history. Regardless, this account reveals the extreme reverence that Civil

War soldiers held for the flags they carried into battle as symbols of something larger than themselves, the Union they loved and were fighting to preserve. Better to destroy one's own flag than for it to be disgraced by the enemy.

As a result of the battle of Atlanta, the 3rd Iowa was so decimated that it was unable to continue functioning even as a battalion let alone a regiment. Those who survived were consolidated with the 2nd Iowa Veteran Infantry to form the new 2nd and 3rd Veteran Infantry Consolidated. As part of this new expanded regiment, the men of the former 3rd Iowa Infantry participated in the remainder of the Atlanta campaign, marched with Sherman across Georgia to Savannah that fall, and then participated in Sherman's invasion of the Carolina's early in 1865. Despite the tragedy of the 3rd Iowa Infantry, those few who survived marched proudly down Pennsylvania Avenue in May, 1865 in the Grand Review.

Three flags of the 3rd Iowa Infantry, all U.S. nationals, survive in the collection of the State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI). Flag number 2001.71.65 can be documented as the one that was captured at Atlanta on July 22, 1864. It was captured by the 24th and 25th Consolidated Texas (dismounted) Cavalry of General Pat Cleburne's Division. H.T. Messengale, who was a major of cavalry and on General Johnston's staff, related years later that General Cleburne gave the flag to his sister Laura who was living at the time on their father's plantation near Columbus, GA. She put it away in a cedar chest, left it there, and forgot about it for 19 years. Now Mrs. Laura J. Pickett, she discovered it still in her cedar chest in July, 1883. She turned it over to Messengale who then forwarded it to William L. Alexander, Adjutant General of Iowa.^{xv} A full contemporary description of the flag was given in the *Iowa State Register*:

It is about half left, the end with the stars remaining. It has the full number of stripes and on them are inscribed the names of the battles in which it floated, excepting of course the last one, in which it was taken. The upper corner of the stars next to the stripes, is gone, but the rest of the blue is in a fair condition, considering its age. On the first light stripe is “BLUE R”—the rest of the Ridge is gone. On the second light stripe is “S,” then a hole made by a bombshell, and “LO” hangs in the tatters at the edge, which proves that Shiloh shared its bloody field with the Third Iowa. Then the “SIEGE OF C,” and we know that is Corinth. In the central dark stripe, or the seventh from top and bottom, as is usual, is the name of the regiment—“3RD REGIMENT OF IO” the “O” about half complete...”MATAMORA” is half there, on the eighth stripe, and “SIEGE OF VICK” tells of Vicksburg. The last battle before it fell was “JACKSON,” the last two letters only gone. The yellow fringe that bordered the top and bottom remains for about a yard, and as we touched the lower fringe some mud from the battle-field near Atlanta crumbled off in our hands—the inscription that was not written on its folds.^{xvi}

The discovery and return of the flag raised questions as to whether this was also the flag that was torn up by members of the Third Iowa in the streets of Atlanta. A.P. Wood, a printer in Dubuque, wrote to Alexander indicating that Major Crosley believed it was distinctly possible that the men tore only part of the flag, leaving the remainder to the Confederates. Wood noted that the description given in the *Iowa State Register* did not specifically state whether the flag was torn by human hands or whether it had been torn violently from its staff. No record has been found of a response by Alexander to Wood’s request for information. The flag went to the Adjutant General’s office and was presumably kept in the state armory until all the flags were transferred to the Capitol Building on August 10, 1894. The flag resided on display in the Capitol until it was transferred to the State Historical Society in October, 2004, for preservation treatment.

An examination of the flag reveals that the hoist end of the flag is in relatively stable condition and that it was not torn from its staff. The fly end may have been torn, but souveniring has occurred rendering it difficult to tell if it had been torn. Also, the fly end was trimmed to apply the 1904 conservation treatment. The description quoted above from the *Iowa State Register* indicates that the parts of the flag that are now

missing are nearly identical to the parts of the flag missing in 1883, so whatever souveniring occurred was not extensive. The physical evidence indicates that it is unlikely that the flag was the one torn apart in the streets of Atlanta.^{xvii} Also, the quote on the incident that occurred in the streets in Atlanta strongly infers that the men of the 3rd Iowa essentially destroyed the flag, not just a portion on the fly end. The two stories are most likely about different flags, and the evidence indicates a strong likelihood that this flag was not the one torn up in the streets of Atlanta.



2001.71.65, 3rd Iowa Infantry, National flag, © State Historical Society of Iowa.

Flag number U 403 is the U.S. national flag carried by Sergeant James Lakin of Company F and Corporal Anderson Edwards of Company I at the Battle of Shiloh (also known as the Battle of Pittsburg Landing.) The flag is badly shattered, a common occurrence on flags made of silk. The red stripes on the flag are so badly faded that they appear only slightly darker than the white stripes. On the second stripe from the top the letters “PITTS” appear which indicates battle honors for Pittsburg Landing (Shiloh.) On the seventh stripe the words “3rd REGT IOWA” appear for the identification of the regiment. All of the original 34 stars on the canton are still visible indicating a relatively

early manufacture date. The flag was attached to the staff with ribbons. The fly end is extremely worn from either battle and/or deterioration.^{xviii}



U 403, 3rd Iowa Infantry, National flag, © State Historical Society of Iowa.

Flag number 2001.71.66 is also a U.S. national. There are 32 stars visible in the canton painted in copper, but an estimated 3 three stars are missing due to deterioration of the flag. This flag was manufactured in the middle to later stages of the war. Battle honors painted on the flag include Blue Mills and Shiloh on the top red stripe, Siege of Corinth on the second red stripe, Matamora and an illegible entry on the fourth red stripe, Jackson and an illegible entry on the fifth red stripe, Sherman's March to the Sea on the sixth red stripe, and Savannah (several letters missing) and an illegible entry on the seventh red stripe. On the third red stripe is the inscription "3rd Regt Inf Veteran." The battle honors are painted in different styles which indicate that they were added from time to time during the war.^{xix}



2001.71.66, 3rd Iowa Infantry, National flag, © State Historical Society of Iowa.

Four color bearers/members of the color guard have been identified from the 3rd

Iowa Infantry:

- Sergeant James H. Lakin, Company F, of Westfield^{xx}
- Corporal Robert P. Griffith, Company A, of Clayton County^{xxi}
- Corporal Anderson Edwards, Company I, of Clarksville
- Private Henry B. Shaw, Company I, of Waterloo^{xxii}

Summary of Casualties^{xxiii}

Total Enrollment	1,109
Killed	76
Wounded	370
Died of wounds	30
Died of disease	109
Discharged for wounds, disease, other causes	270
Buried in national cemeteries	81
Captured	116
Transferred	24

ⁱ Kenneth L. Lyftogt, "The Hardest Battle We Have Yet Witnessed," *The Palimpsest* Volume 68, Number 3, Fall, 1987, p. 103.

ⁱⁱ Kenneth L. Lyftogt, *From Blue Mills to Columbia: Cedar Falls and the Civil War*. Ames, IA. Iowa State University Press, 1993, p. 25.

ⁱⁱⁱ Troop rosters were published in 1911 for all of Iowa's Civil War volunteer regiments. See Guy E. Logan, *Roster and Record of Iowa Troops in the Rebellion*. Volume 1. State of Iowa, 1908, 2nd Iowa Infantry, 2nd Iowa Veteran Infantry, 3rd Iowa Infantry, and 2nd and 3rd Veteran Infantry Consolidated, pp. 91-524.

^{iv} Robert Garden, *History of Scott Township Mahaska County, Iowa: War Reminiscences. Did the Buffalo Ever Inhabit Iowa?* Oskaloosa, IA. Globe Presses, 1907, p. 102, 104.

^v Logan, p. 286; also Lurton Denham Ingersoll, *Iowa and the Rebellion*. Philadelphia. Lippincott, 1866, p. 58.

^{vi} Report by Captain M.M. Trumbull to Brigadier General Stephen A. Hurlbut, April 17, 1862, in Regimental Reports, 3rd Infantry, Battle of Shiloh, in Iowa State Archives, Adjutant General, Brigade Reports.

^{vii} George Crosley, "Lieutenant Crosley Tells of 3rd at Shiloh," *Civil War History* Volume 2 1956, p. 142.

^{viii} Seymour Dwight Thompson, *Recollections with the Third Iowa Regiment*. Cincinnati, OH, 1864, pp. 244-245.

^{ix} Logan, p. 290; Ingersoll, pp. 70-71.

^x *Cedar Falls Gazette*, July 3, 1863, reprinted in Lyftogt, *From Blue Mills...*, p. 100.

^{xi} Thompson, p. 387.

^{xii} Logan, *Roster and Records*, p. 291; Ingersoll, *Iowa and the Rebellion*, p. 72.

^{xiii} Garden, p. 186-187.

^{xiv} Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* Volume 2. New York. The Century History Company, 1903, pp. 144-145.

^{xv} This part of the story can be traced through a series of letters found in the Iowa State Archives. See Adjutant General, Civil War. The specific letters are: Messengale to Alexander, July 28, 1883; Messengale to Alexander, August 7, 1883; Messengale to Alexander, August 28, 1883; and Irving A. Buck to Laura J. Pickett, August 23, 1883. These letters were reprinted in the *Iowa State Register*, August 12, 1883, p. 2 and in *Report of William L. Alexander Adjutant General and A.Q.M.G of the State of Iowa to Hon. Buren R. Sherman, Governor of Iowa for Biennial Period ending June 30, A.D. 1883*. Des Moines, IA. George E. Roberts, State Printer, 1884, pp. 7-10.

^{xvi} *Iowa State Register*, August 12, 1883, p. 2; also see Garden, pp. 194-195.

^{xvii} State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI), Artifact No. 2001.71.65, Registration File.

^{xviii} SHSI, Artifact No. U 403, Registration File.

^{xix} SHSI, Artifact No. 2001.71.66.

^{xx} There are many sources that document Lakin and Edwards as color bearers. The original document is Trumbull's report to Hurlbut. See footnote 6.

^{xxi} There are several sources that document Griffith as color bearer and his death at Atlanta on July 22, 1864. See Gue, p. 144; and Ingersoll, p. 73.

^{xxii} Shaw was identified as a color bearer for the August 10, 1894, transfer of flags from the State Armory to the State Capitol Building. It is unclear whether he was a color bearer or part of the color guard during the war.

^{xxiii} Logan, *Roster and Records*, p. 293.

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