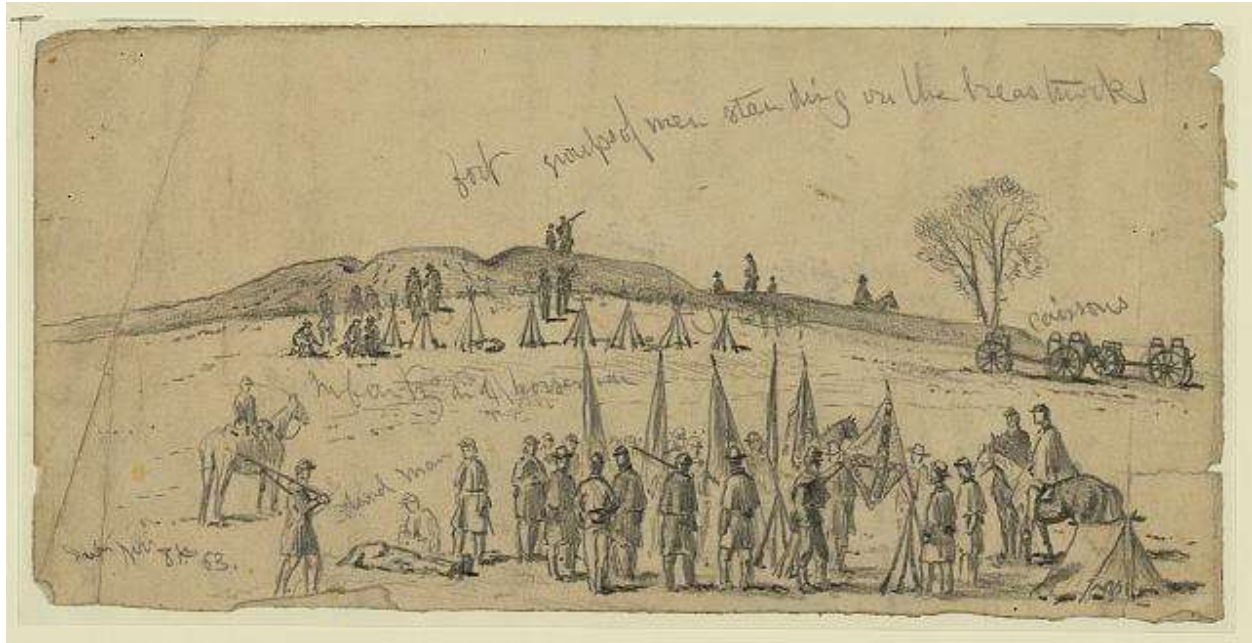


IOWA HISTORY



Courtesy Library of Congress
Civil War Battle of Rappahannock Station in Virginia

An Iowa Soldier's Baptism of Fire

In May 1862 a group of 12 men from Clear Lake traveled to Cedar Falls to enlist in the Union army. Among the group who were willing to join the fight to preserve the Union during the Civil War were two brothers, Winslow Casady (W.C.) Tompkins and Caleb Tompkins.

"Our squad of 12 left Clear Lake May 13, 1862, and went to Cedar Falls by team and then by rail to Dubuque, where we remained for about three weeks until our company was organized," W.C. explained in an interview with a newspaper reporter in 1910. By then he was the only survivor of the group of men who had enlisted from Clear Lake.

The Iowa company was sent to Fort Hamilton in New York. From there they went to Fort Lafayette, New York, where they served as guards at a government prison. When the rest of the company was sent to the front, W.C. and Caleb remained in their duties as prison guards. Later they were ordered to be part of a crew on a boat that carried mail and dispatches to locations around New York harbor. After about a year W.C. was ordered to New York City where his regiment was charged with suppressing riots that had broken out over the draft. From there W.C. went to Virginia and then to the firing line of the Union forces.

"It was there I had my baptism of fire in real warfare," W.C. recalled.

W.C. went on the fight in some of the war's bloodiest battles: Rappahannock Station, Mine Run, Wilderness, Laurel Hill, Spotsylvania Court House, North Anna River, Bethesda Church, Cold Harbor and Petersburg. At the battle of Weldon Railroad in 1864 W.C., along with most of his brigade, was captured by the Rebels and sent to Pemberton Prison in Virginia. They spent the rest of the war there and released in a prisoner exchange at Big Bend, Va, on March 9,

1865.

W.C. was sent to Fort Hamilton, New York, where he was hospitalized for typhoid fever for six weeks. In May 1865 he finally returned to his home in Clear Lake. Of the 12 men from Clear Lake who had enlisted with W.C., three were killed in battle and one deserted. All the others returned home to Clear Lake after the war.

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