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The Palimpsest

Volume 53 | Number 4

Article 3

4-1-1972

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Recommended Citation

Cheever, L O. "Iowans and the Medal of Honor." *The Palimpsest* 53 (1972), 182-184.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol53/iss4/3>

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Iowans and the Medal of Honor

It was the Civil War that witnessed the birth of the Medal of Honor. It was the Civil War that presented Iowans with their introduction to the heartaches of war.

Iowa, in 1861, had been a state only 14 years. It had no forts, no garrisons, no organized military units. Yet when President Abraham Lincoln called on Iowa Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood, in mid-April, to supply a regiment, the state was ready. The 1st Iowa Infantry steamed down the Mississippi in May, 1861, on its way to Wilson's Creek in Southwest Missouri, where it would take part in one of the bloodiest battles of the war; suffered its first fatality; and where one of its members would become Iowa's first recipient of the Medal of Honor.

Two months later the 2nd and 3rd Regiments were enroute south. When 1861 closed Iowa had 19 units in the field. In all 58 regiments and four artillery batteries were organized during the war.

From an 1860 population of 674,000 people, 76,000 men—11 per cent of the total population—went into the Federal armies.

Iowans campaigned from Wilson's Creek to Bentonville, in the Carolinas, in some of the blood-

iest fighting in history. Iowa's first battle fatality, Shelby Norman, came at Wilson's Creek; one out of every four Union soldiers who fell at Shiloh was an Iowan; Iowans spearheaded Grant's drive on Vicksburg and Sherman's march to the sea. In the west Iowans were an integral part of every major battle of the Civil War.

It is no wonder Iowans came away with 29 Medals of Honor. It is no wonder that Iowans serving in the nation's later wars, conflicts, and campaigns have increased that total to 60 medals.

Turning to the number of medals awarded Iowans, some lists may show another name—Paul L. Bolden. Army records show Sergeant Bolden's birthplace as Hobbes Island, Iowa. Bolden, a veteran of World War II, lives in Tennessee and an inquiry as to the location of Hobbes Island brought this reply:

"The information in the 1948 Medal of Honor book stating that I was born in Iowa is a mistake. I was born in Hobbs Island, Alabama, a suburb of Huntsville, Alabama, now."

The birthplace for a Civil War veteran, George W. Welch, has been given as Brown County, Iowa. Iowa has no Brown County. Indiana has such a County, and the abbreviation, Ia., was used for Indiana in that period. So, finding that Welch was not shown on Iowa rosters, it was assumed he came from Indiana.

Seeking information on Lewis Phife of Des

Moines County, relatives were able to correct the records as far as he is concerned. The correct spelling for this Indian fighter is Louis Pfeiff.

The bravery of these Iowans will be recorded in terse government announcements in the pages which follow. Among them you will find:

Nick Bouquet, of Burlington, probably was the first Iowan to be awarded the medal. He served with the 1st Iowa at Wilson's Creek, the first of the big battles west of the Mississippi.

James M. Elson, of Shellsburg, was wounded severely at Vicksburg and Atlanta, yet lived until 1894 when a rebel bullet he had carried for 30 years caused his death.

George W. Healey, captured and sent to the infamous Andersonville prison, had timbers from that prison sent to Dubuque and displayed them in his hardware store for years.

The escape attempts of Commander Edouard V. M. Izac, of Cresco, were fantastic. One of them brought him the Medal of Honor.