

ELI WOOD

Eli Wood was born in Pennsylvania, but moved to Iowa before the Civil War. There, on January 26, 1845, he and Lydia Mellinger (with the consent of her father) were married in Dubuque County. In 1847, during the war with Mexico, Eli enlisted in the U.S. Infantry where he served under General William Worth. Eli was discharged a year later at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, and settled in northern Iowa where he "made an immediate effort to have the new county named after his favorite general." In 1859, a meeting was held at Eli's house in Section 9 of Worth County and Eli was elected a Trustee of the newly formed Hartland Township.

During the presidential election campaign in 1860, some states in the South threatened to secede if Abraham Lincoln was elected, but the threat was largely discounted in the North. "Bah! No one anticipates such a result," said the Clayton County Journal. "This cry was invented only to frighten the people into voting for the Democratic candidate. Divide the Union! The people of the United States are not prepared to do any such thing," but the Journal was wrong. States did secede and, on April 12, 1861, General Beauregard's Confederate cannon fired on Fort Sumter. President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers, volunteers who were asked to serve for three months. That seemed like plenty of time to put down the rebellion in the South, but the war escalated into a second year, casualties mounted, more men were needed and, on March 19, 1862, Eli Wood was a forty-four-year-old farmer when he enlisted as a Private in what was to be the 18th Regiment of Iowa's volunteer infantry. They were ordered into quarters at Clinton but were over-subscribed and Eli was one of many who were transferred to what would be the bulk of Company A of the 21st Infantry, a company ordered into quarters at Camp Franklin in Dubuque on May 23rd.

On July 9, 1862, Iowa's governor, Sam Kirkwood, received a telegram asking him to raise five new regiments in addition to those already in the field. If not raised by August 15th, a draft was likely. Enlistments came quickly and the remaining nine companies were mustered in on August 18th, the same day Eli was promoted to 5th Corporal in Company A. On September 9th, all ten companies of the 21st Infantry were mustered into service as a regiment with a total of 985 men.

On a rainy September 16th, they boarded the four-year-old sidewheel steamer *Henry Clay* and two barges tied alongside and started south. They spent their first night on Rock Island, resumed their trip the next day, encountered low water at Montrose, debarked, traveled by train to Keokuk, boarded the *Hawkeye State*, and reached St. Louis on the 20th. On the 21st they were inspected at Benton Barracks and, that night, boarded rail cars at the depot. The next morning they arrived in Rolla but the water at their first campsite had the "breath of sewers" so they relocated to a site southwest of town where there was good spring water.

Little training had been received at Camp Franklin, so they spent the next several weeks being trained and, "most importantly," said William Crooke, learning to take orders. By October 31st, they were in Salem and Eli was marked "present" on the bi-monthly Company Muster Roll. From Salem they moved to Houston and then Hartville but returned to Houston after a wagon train was attacked on November 24th. They were still there when word was received in January that a Confederate column was advancing on Springfield. A hastily-organized relief force left on the 9th, passed through Hartville on the 10th, and that night camped along Woods Fork of the Gasconade river, unaware that the Confederates were camped nearby. Early on the 11th, brief firing by pickets alerted each to the other and the two sides moved into Hartville where the one-day Battle of Hartville was fought before they again returned to Houston. Military records do not indicate that Eli was present during the battle.

He did, however, move with the regiment from Houston, to West Plains and then to the northeast where he was present when the February 28th muster roll was taken at Iron Mountain. From there they moved to Ste. Genevieve and then to Milliken's Bend, Louisiana, where General Grant was organizing an army to capture Vicksburg. Eli was present but sick in his quarters at "the Bend," but was with his comrades when they crossed into Mississippi and was present during the May 1, 1863, Battle of Port Gibson, the May 16th Battle of Champion Hill (when the regiment was held out of action by General McClernand), the May 17th assault at the Big Black River, and during the initial weeks of the siege at Vicksburg. While there, he became ill and on June 21st was sent to Memphis where he was admitted a week later to the Adams General Hospital. Still in the hospital on August 13th, Eli died with his death attributed by some reports to pneumonia and by others to chronic diarrhea. He is buried in the Memphis National Cemetery.

On November 18, 1863, Lydia was living in Cedar City when she signed (by mark) an application for a pension for herself and her seven children who were still under sixteen years of age. Her application was supported by Peter and John Mellinger who said they had known the couple for about twenty years and "were present at their marriage and that they have lived together as husband and wife until the said soldier enlisted in the service of the United States."

The Adjutant General's Office in the War Department reported to the Commissioner of Pensions that it found no evidence of Eli being enrolled or mustered into service, but there was a report of his death in Memphis.

A year later, with her application still not approved, Lydia signed an affidavit and explained that, although she had been married by a Justice of the Peace in Dubuque County, "the officiating magistrate neglected to make the return to the clerk of the court as required by law" and, as a result, there was no written evidence of the marriage. On April 21, 1865, her application was approved and six days later a pension certificate was issued. She died on July 1, 1868.

In August, Alvin Nichols of Cedar Falls was appointed Guardian of Lydia's five children who were still under sixteen. Supportive affidavits were filed by friends and relatives who confirmed their names and birth dates and, said Susan Mellinger, the "children are in destitute & needy circumstances." On July 13, 1869, a certificate was issued providing for a monthly pension of \$8.00 together with \$2.00 for each of the children.

The place of Lydia's burial has not been found and the same is true of the seven children born to Eli and Lydia: Francis and Lovina whose birth dates aren't known and Delia (or Deliliah) born March 13, 1853, Rhoda born March 12, 1854, Amy born October 14, 1856, John born March 11, 1859, and Eli Jr. born July 2, 1862.