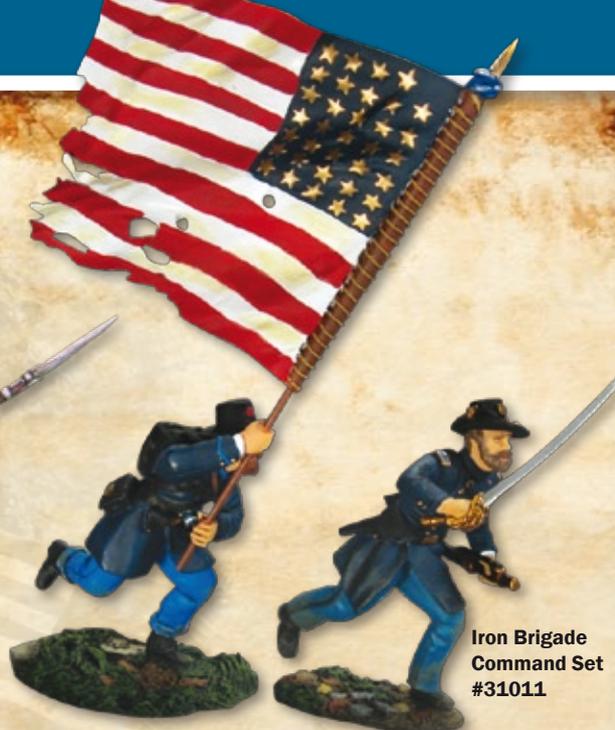




Iron Brigade Charging
#31007



Iron Brigade
Command Set
#31011

'The Black Hats'

James H. Hillestad, Member No. 6 looks at an illustrious Union Army formation with an unusual nickname.

In 1861, what was to be known as the Iron Brigade was made up of four Western regiments, the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin, and the 19th Indiana. A fifth, the 24th Michigan, joined the following year.

The men were mostly country boys from farms and small towns.

THE HARDEE HAT

The Hardee Hat was named after William J. Hardee, Commandant of Cadets at West Point from 1856 to 1860. Ironically, it came into use in 1858, when Jefferson Davis was Secretary of War. It was, however, not popular with the soldiers, who found it to be too hot and shunned it in favor of the képi. Regulations specified that the Hardee hat be adorned with a brass hat pin and a wool hat cord denoting the branch of service: blue for infantry, red for artillery, yellow for cavalry. The brim was to be pinned up on the right side for the cavalrymen and on the left side for foot soldiers, though this was not a hard and fast rule.

Hardee Hat



Though a good number were native-born Americans, Irishmen and Scandinavians accounted for forty percent of the brigade. Added to that was a sprinkling of Germans, Englishmen, and Canadians.

In October of 1861, an artillery battery was added – Battery B, commanded by Major John Gibbon. The battery served with the brigade for the next three years and was affectionately dubbed by the troops as “Bloody B.”

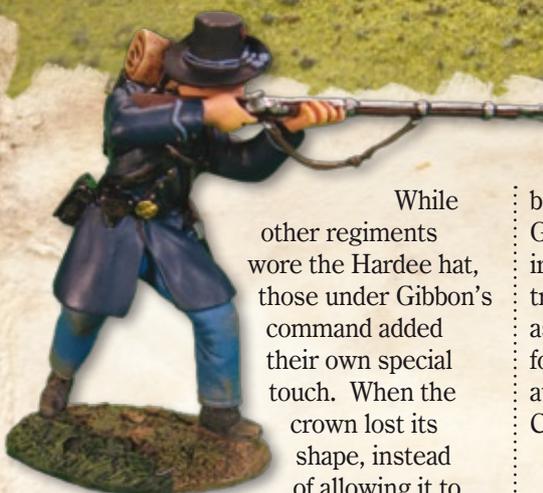
The next year, Gibbon assumed command of the entire brigade, and immediately set about improving the efficiency of his command. He equipped the troops with new, distinctive uniforms which included a

dark blue single-breasted frock-coat and, instead of the képi, a black felt Hardee hat with a black plume or feather.





Men of the 7th Wisconsin and 19th Indiana, supported by Battery B, attack the Confederates at Antietam, September 1862.



**Iron Brigade
Firing #31003**

While other regiments wore the Hardee hat, those under Gibbon's command added their own special touch. When the crown lost its shape, instead of allowing it to slouch down, they punched it up, earning the men the popular nickname "The Black Hats."

At the battle of Turner's Gap by South Mountain in September 1862 (the prelude to the Battle of Antietam), Gibbon's brigade attacked the Confederates commanded by General Longstreet. After the battle in which the brigade suffered more than 300 casualties, General McClellan remarked that "their

bravery could not be excelled," and General Hooker spoke of them as his iron brigade. Thus it was that, to the troops' delight, they became known as the "Iron Brigade." The brigade fought at First and Second Bull Run, at Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville.

At Gettysburg, they were the first infantry in action, and during the battle incurred 1,200 casualties out of a total of 1,800 who entered the battle. It was widely acknowledged that the Iron Brigade played a decisive role in the Union's victory, which in turn led to the final triumph of the North.

The Iron Brigade ended the war as one of the mostly highly regarded units in the Union Army.

A footnote: during the Civil War,

there were two brigades nicknamed "Iron Brigade" – the Western brigade described here, and the Eastern Brigade, made up of the 22nd, 24th, and 30th New York regiments, the 14th Regiment (New York State Militia), and the 2nd U.S. Sharpshooters. Most of the Eastern regiments were mustered out before the Battle of Gettysburg.

Hats off to the Iron Brigades! ■

Jim Hillestad operates under the name "The Toy Soldier Museum." His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570 629-7227, or visit his new website at www.the-toy-soldier.com.