



# Branding Iron

► by **Eric Grant**, general manager

## Living history

*James Albert Hard was a Union soldier who fought as an infantryman in some of the Civil War's bloodiest battles. It was at Chancellorsville that his unit suffered its greatest losses — 222 killed, wounded or missing. However, Hard lived well beyond the horrors of the battlefield to die peacefully in 1953.*

### Witness to modernization

He was 111 at the time of his death, the oldest surviving combat veteran of the war. He even met Abraham Lincoln. His life reminds us that significant events — too often assigned to the dustbin of history — were not that long ago, and they continue to shape the world we live in today.

Hard witnessed the rise of technology, from the first industrial applications of electricity to the widespread use of things like television, radio and the advent of the first, primitive computers.

He also saw the dark side of humanity

— the evolution from muzzle-loaded muskets that fired across the fields of Antietam to the atomic bombs dropped on Japanese cities.

This spring, America celebrated the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War and the 70th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany. Both events forged the modern world that we live in today — the borders of our countries, and the cultural and economic ties among them.

When we think about the flow of history and the people who bridge the gaps from the present to our past, people like Hard, it's

unsettling to think that about 25% of the U.S. population wasn't even born when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

We've forgotten more than we will ever know.

Most of this 25% is preoccupied with new technologies that celebrate and encourage self-immersion — things like smartphones and Facebook. These things disconnect us from what's real, replacing it with artificial constructs of our present-day lives.

Ranches and farms are places where real life still plays out on a daily basis. They're also a direct social, historical and economic connection to our past, and represent a path to our country's future prosperity and stability.

### Taken for granted

Food is always paramount for people, but it's become an invisible, unnoticeable concern for the masses, something a whole generation now takes completely for granted.

How far we've come in such a short period of time.

Hunger and malnutrition during the Civil War were rampant, as was disease. It's ironic to me that the No. 1 killer wasn't the musket, the bayonet or the cannon. Nearly one-third of the 600,000-plus soldiers who died during the conflict died of disease. There were no hygienic practices because there was no understanding of disease and how it spread.

The battlefields — and more specifically, the field hospitals — became the gristmills of scientific advancement, and the awful things we learned there resulted in a safer, healthier and more prosperous world.

Going forward, it's our obligation to remember the thousands who still walk among us who gave it all to secure a tomorrow. Unlike Hard — who was blessed with more than 100 years of life — many of them never got to see the future for which they were fighting.

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