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The Poughkeepsie Eagle

Following the shots at Fort Sumter at 4:30 A.M. on April 12, 1861, the United States was thrust into its worst conflict, the Civil War. This period of American history would see over 620,000 casualties as fighting and disease tore through the ranks of both the Union and Confederates troops. The war affected all Americans in some way. From April, 1861 to September, 1862, The Civil War saw fierce action that led to threats to the North and Washington D.C. The Hudson River Valley and New York were not exempt and provided troops and material to the cause to maintain and defend the Union at all costs.

In the days following the attack on Fort Sumter, President Lincoln issued a declaration calling for 75,000 troops broken down between the states. Some states would refuse and turn to the Confederacy, such as North Carolina. On April 15th, however, New York pledged 30,000 men to the cause as The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily mentioned, as well as stating, "New York will not derelict in this hour of trial. First in rank in the sisterhood of states, she should be the first in the field."¹ The feelings expressed in New York suggested that there was a large Union backing and patriotism that had been developing in the state since before even the secession of South Carolina. E.B. Morgan, the governor of New York at the time also expressed these same feelings as he exclaimed, "Let not New York falter in this hour of the Country's peril..."² The Eagle, in the same article consisting of the Governor's Message showed the patriotism of Albany, proclaiming the, "...excitement is on the increase," and, "Flags are displayed in many

¹ "New York to Furnish Thirty Thousand Men," *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (April 15, 1861): 2.

² E.B. Morgan, "Governor's Message," *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (April 15, 1861): 2.

places.”³ The Poughkeepsie area, Dutchess County and the surrounding counties were not hesitant to supply troops and volunteers as, “A company of volunteers, consisting of some 250 men have just passed up State Street on their way to tender their services to the Governor.”⁴

However, even as this surge in troops and patriotism that overcame the Union the President still needed to call for more troops in order to quell the revolting South. Once again as expressed in *The Eagle*, “The President’s call to-day for seventy-five thousand men, will soon be followed by a call for *one hundred thousand men*; and that will be followed by a call for still another hundred thousand.”⁵ Lincoln wished to end the conflict quickly and decisively; the plan was to choke the Confederate States by the setting up a naval blockade of their ports. April 20th, this seige was implemented. “The President...has further deemed it advisable to set on foot a blockade...in pursuance of the laws of the United States and the law of nation in such cases provided. For this purpose a competent force will be posted to prevent the entrance and exit of vessels.”⁶ In addition to this blockade, there were countries that expressed sympathy for the United States as can be seen by a Canadian man who stated that 600 men from Quebec and Montreal were marching to Boston to enlist in the regular army.⁷

On April 19th, Virginia officially seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy and on the following day Robert E. Lee refused acceptance of the offer by President Lincoln to lead the Union Army and instead became the General of Virginia’s military forces.⁸ The War began to be felt very close to home, as well, for the Hudson Valley. Twenty-three Southern Cadets at West Point were sent home for failing to recite the oath of allegiance of the United States.⁹ Even

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ “The Call for Troops,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (April 15, 1861): 2.

⁶ “The Southern Ports Blockaded,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (April 20, 1861): 2.

⁷ “Aid from Canada,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (April 20, 1861): 2.

⁸ “Virginia Secedes,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (April 19, 1861): 2.

⁹ “Southern Cadets Leave West Point,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (April 25, 1861): 2.

with such actions being taken there were still many positives being felt throughout the Valley.

“One of the finest demonstrations ever made in this city, was had this afternoon at the raising of a splendid new flag on the new flag staff by the citizens. Over 15,000 people gathered. Patriotic speeches were made.”¹⁰ The article, titled “The War,” which was printed a month after the start of the war gave many updates on what was happening at the front and occasionally closer to home. In addition to the flag raising, aforementioned, the swearing in of 21 volunteer regiments in New York was included.¹¹ This was also a common sight to see or hear about in New York during the early months of the war. To show the fervor that built in the area, sales were being made of flags and more items. One such advertisement was called “Flags! Flags! Flags!” and stated that a local entrepreneur had different sizes of flags for reduced prices.¹²

The Poughkeepsie Eagle gives one the sense that the Union was having a successful campaign; there were many victories that The Eagle mentioned, however, these victories were mere skirmishes rather than battles. On July 23rd, the skirmishes were all overshadowed by the first large scale battle of the War. Bull Run was a major defeat for the Union Army at the hands of the Confederates. The defeat was so profound that Lincoln led a reorganization of the army and the promotion of General George B. McClellan from campaigns in West Virginia to replace the failing of General McDowell thus taking command of the Army of the Potomac.¹³ Following the battle the war no longer seemed as if it would be a short conflict but rather a prolonged war that would devastate the countryside. Immediately following the battle, troops began to re-enlist in the army, such as the 18th New York, “whose term expires shortly, unanimously signed a

¹⁰ “The War,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (May 16, 1861): 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “Flags! Flags! Flags!,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (June 5, 1861): 2.

¹³ “Defeat of Our Troops,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (July 23, 1861): 2.

paper to re-enlist for three years.”¹⁴ Following Bull Run, there were more skirmishes and no large engagements for a few months; however, in November of 1861 a costly error by a Navy Captain led to an international affair, threatening the United States.

On November 18th, The Eagle published in The War column a story titled, “Two Rebel Embassadors Taken.” Two ambassadors of the Southern Confederacy to the British, James Mason and John Slidell were aboard a British ship that had been searched by Captain Wilkes of the United States Navy. When the ambassadors were located they were taken into custody under protest by the British captain.¹⁵ Following the incident the British government demanded an apology and, “the restitution to the protection of the British flag to those who were violently and illegally torn from that sacred asylum.”¹⁶ Since the capture had been made in international waters while the ambassadors were under a neutral nation’s flag, the act was deemed illegal; the British began threatening war and France sided with them, going so far as to recognize the Southern confederacy.¹⁷ Finally, on December 30, The Eagle published that Mason and Slidell were released back to the British, though tensions remained high and threats of war remained for a month longer.¹⁸ The war would soon be entering into the second year of the conflict, 1862.

With an end to threats by the British of an international war the focus of The Poughkeepsie Eagle turned back to the developments at the front. In February, 1862 a report that General Ulysses S. Grant surrounded Fort Donnelson on the Mississippi River with seven batteries of artillery was printed. It went on to say that the fort would be shelled and predicted capture within the next day, this following the capture of Fort Henry days earlier.¹⁹ A column

¹⁴ “Troops Re-Enlisting,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (July 23, 1861): 2.

¹⁵ “Two Rebel Embassadors Taken,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (November 18, 1861): 2.

¹⁶ “The Mason and Slidell Affair,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (December 16, 1861): 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “Mason and Slidell Given Up,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (December 30, 1861): 2.

¹⁹ “Further from the Tennessee,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (February 12, 1862): 2.

was published in *The Eagle* stating, “Blessings, cheers, and the wildest enthusiasm greeted the boats everywhere. Prominent men...said that if the Union army entered Tennessee 50,000 men...would cluster around it.”²⁰ The article went on to explain that these men exclaimed were compelled to join the Confederacy and that the choice was that of the politicians rather than the people.²¹ Though, there was heavy action elsewhere in the war and on March 10th, *The Eagle* reported a battle that would change military technology forever. The Ironclads *Merrimac* (Confederacy) and *Monitor* (Union) engaged each other, “...from 8 a.m. till noon, when the *Merrimac* retired,” and thus all wooden hull ships were now obsolete.²² During the course of the battle, several ships had been sunk and the ironclads received minimal damage.

With the success in Tennessee and on the water the Union appeared to be moving for victory. However, on April 9th, a great battle was reported from Tennessee, “The battle raged all day. Our lines were driven in by the attack, but as our reserves were brought into action, the lost ground was regained and the rebels repulsed with terrible slaughter.”²³ The Battle of Shiloh was a surprise attack on the Union by a large Confederate force; though, Grant and his troops were able to fight back the attack and gain a victory in the West but it came at a very large cost. The battle had the largest amount of casualties of any battle to date in the war. Later that month, the Union gained “another important victory” by capturing the key city of New Orleans, effectively preventing reinforcing up the Mississippi River and choking the Confederate Army on the Western front.²⁴

Though, on the Eastern front, Confederate troops were on the move and forced a Union defeat that put the capitol in danger. In response to this, New York regiments began mobilizing

²⁰ “The Expedition up the Tennessee,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (February 14, 1862): 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² “Desperate Naval Battle,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (March 10, 1862): 2.

²³ General Grant’s Staff, “Great Battle in Tennessee,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (April 9, 1862): 2.

²⁴ “Another Great Victory,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (April 28, 1862): 2.

and were sent to Washington to reinforce the area.²⁵ The Eagle published that, “Gov. Morgan...is expected to return [from Washington] to-morrow evening, when orders for the draft will probably be issued.”²⁶ Troops were being mobilized once again for the defense of the capitol and what seemed to be another offensive. On August 7, the newspaper included an article from a letter written to The Eagle on July 31st by a soldier whose initials were simply, S.H.B. Jr. He mentioned, “We are anxiously awaiting the order to advance. We can whip Jackson, but while we are waiting here another enemy is decimating our ranks.... Disease fell, insidious disease is eating the vitals of the army and counting its victims by thousands.”²⁷ Disease was one of the major killers of the Civil War; though, this soldier, who presumably was from the Hudson River Valley, had other issues to address. “This regiment has not been paid off for just five months and the men need the funds for their families if not for themselves. Now this is a wrong that should be immediately remedied.”²⁸ These feelings expressed by this particular soldier were true of many others who felt wronged by the lack of some simple comfort in the face of the horrors of war. Personal insights such as this are crucial to the understanding of such an important event in our history and how the people of the time, who were involved, felt.

That same month of August a second battle took place at Bull Run. General John Pope of the Union engaged General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson in a smashing victory. On August 28, Pope wrote, “...I do not see how the enemy is to escape without heavy loss,” and, “We have captured 1000 prisoners, many arms and one piece of artillery.”²⁹ The battle, which took place over a course of days, was sure to bring the Union close to Richmond and put the Confederacy at risk for losing the war. On August 30th, Pope wrote again, “The battle was fought on the identical

²⁵ “Movements of Troops,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (May 27, 1862): 2.

²⁶ “From Albany,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (August 7, 1862): 2.

²⁷ S.H.B. Jr., “Camp Correspondence,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (August 7, 1862): 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ John Pope, “Severe Fight with Gen. Jackson,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (August 30, 1862): 2.

battlefield of Bull Run, which greatly increased the enthusiasm of our men.”³⁰ By this point, many believed the battle was now won; however, on September 4th, The Eagle had written, “Lee has established his headquarters three miles beyond Bull Run”; Pope had fallen back across the Potomac to Washington.³¹ General Robert E. Lee had arrived at the battle and turned the tide at the last moment. Days later, hope faded from the North; “There is no doubt of the fact that the rebels, in strong force, are...on the opposite shore.” Robert E. Lee and the Confederate forces had crossed the Potomac and invaded the North.³²

The Civil War had entered a new phase with the invasion of the North by Robert E. Lee and many in the North began to feel the hopelessness that came with it. The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily remained at the forefront of gathering and expressing the latest updates of the war to the people of the Hudson River Valley. From the shots on Fort Sumter to the international crisis between Britain and the U.S. and finally to the invasion by Lee; the people of the River Valley were constantly involved in the war and would be for the following years and the aftermath. The war, two years into the struggle, still had more to come.

³⁰ John Pope, “A Great Battle at Bull Run,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (September 1, 1862): 2.

³¹ “Pope Fallen Back,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (September 4, 1862): 2.

³² “The Rebels Crossing into Maryland,” *The Poughkeepsie Eagle Daily* (September 8, 1862): 2.

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