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The Poughkeepsie Eagle

During the end of 1863, the Union Army had made progress in the western campaign, effectively ending the war in that theater. As January of 1864 came the war was entering its final phase as the rebellion struggled to make gains against the North. However, some of the most important events of the Civil War and the immediate aftermath of it would follow between January, 1864 and May of 1865. Some included terrible losses to both the Confederacy and to the Union but all remain pivotal to the course of the Civil War as we know it.

At the beginning of 1864 there were many celebrations but not of military victory. The Eagle reported many celebrations by blacks in the days following New Year's Day, exclaiming, "The colored inhabitants of Norfolk and vicinity celebrated to-day as the first anniversary of their freedom given by the President's emancipation Proclamation."¹ Joining them were black troops of the Union Army as well, and the celebrations were not restrained to Norfolk but throughout the North and occupied territories. At the same time, black men were being mustered by the Union to serve the country against the Confederacy. One ad listed in The Eagle titled, "Attention Colored Men," stated that, "500 colored volunteers wanted to fill the First New York Colored Regiment known as the 20th Reg U.S. Colored Troops. Cash bounty \$375."² The ad mentioned how the pay was at about \$15 per month, making the service time about two years; in addition to the 20th being the only black regiment in New York approved by the War Department.³ The Union also sought to re-enlist soldiers for the remainder of the war, though it

¹ "Emancipation Celebrations," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (January 4, 1864): 2.

² "Attention Colored Men," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (January 4, 1864): 2.

³ *Ibid.*

was not known how long that may be. White veterans of the Civil War up until this point were guaranteed \$865 for reenlistment, while new recruits would be given \$690.⁴ The ranks of the Union Army continued to swell at about 200,000 troops at the time which spoke to the futility of the rebellion.

This feeling though was not one of the North, but rather of the South. Following the victories in the West by the Union, Southern forces and media began doubting the rebellion completely. The Eagle posted information found in *The Richmond Enquirer* on January 8th. It said:

The Richmond Enquirer, Jeff. Davis's immediate organ and unquestioning adherent, has lately given up all attempts to put a good face on the Confederate condition, and upon ground, perhaps, that desperate diseases requires desperate remedies, tells the rebels that unless a good many things (quite beyond the confederate power to do) are done their case is hopeless.⁵

Adding to the displeasure of the Confederates was General Ulysses S. Grant. On March 10th, President Lincoln promoted Grant to Lieutenant General, and gave him command of the entire Union Army, and the Army of the Potomac, the pride of the North.⁶ The command was given in "appreciation" of Grant's actions up until that point and Lincoln said to the new Lieutenant General, "With this high honor devolves upon you also a corresponding trust. As the country herein trust you so under God it will sustain you. I scarcely need to add...my own hearty personal concurrence."⁷ Grant took that trust by the country and the President into consideration and in May began an advance of the Army on all fronts. The Eagle proposed that, "The rebel capital will undoubtedly be flanked and invested should Lee's Army occupy its defenses, and the

⁴ "Volunteers for the Union Army," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (February, 22, 1864): 2.

⁵ "Hopelessness of the Rebellion," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (January 8, 1864): 2.

⁶ "Lieut. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (March 10, 1864): 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

country may reasonably hope that this time Richmond will fall.”⁸ Almost immediately following the beginning of the advance, Grant encountered Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia and engaged it. The Battle was fought near the old Chancellorsville battle ground and Lee was forced into battle with the Union Army.⁹ However, this battle led to the defeat of the Confederate forces and a retreat by General Lee with Grant in pursuit of him.¹⁰ Though, Grant’s Army of the Potomac was not the only Union force on the offensive.

General William Sherman was a commander on the western front during the war. Following the victories in that theater, Sherman slowly began an advance to take a key southern city that would essentially split the Confederacy in two, Atlanta. On May 11, as Grant pursued Lee in Virginia, Sherman launched his own offensive moving towards the Georgia capital.¹¹ Gradually he moved through the state until he was about 20 miles from Atlanta.¹² At this point The Eagle received correspondence from a soldier within Sherman’s Army. He explained the campaign up until that point stating:

Sherman has turned after the flying Johnston with a speed that must make rebellious heels lively, and disloyal breasts pant for cooling streams. Not only has the advance been thus rapid from Chattanooga, but our rear has been so well attended to that we hardly drive “the Johnnies” from a position before the whistle of a Union locomotive is heard, and oriental visions of fresh rations flash upon the tired and dusty warriors...and arms us with renewed yearning for the retreating Seceshers.¹³

The soldier, whose initials are only given as W.R.W., gave valuable insight to the process by which the Union troops under Sherman beat back the Southern forces. In closing of the soldier’s

⁸ “Important! The great movement Begun!” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (May 6, 1864): 2.

⁹ “Great Battle in Virginia,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (May 9, 1864): 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ “Gen. Sherman’s Army in Motion,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (May 11, 1864): 2.

¹² “Sherman only 20 miles from Atlanta,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (June 2, 1864): 2.

¹³ “150th Regt. Correspondence,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (June 10, 1864): 2.

letter to *The Eagle* he exclaimed, "The fight has been going on for five days, and is still raging hotly, and the rebels are evidently doing their utmost to keep us from getting through, but we hope before many days to send you a glorious account with our headquarters at Atlanta."¹⁴ While Sherman began and worked through his advance towards Atlanta, Grant had been managing to make headway in Virginia against Lee.

In the beginning of June, right around when Sherman was within 20 miles of Atlanta, Grant encountered Robert E. Lee at Cold Harbor. The Union Army vastly outnumbered Lee but on June 3, Grant's Army took heavy casualties following a full frontal assault on the fortified positions of Lee. Over 12,000 Union soldiers were killed, wounded or missing from the attack.¹⁵ While the two armies engaged each other over the next week it was still deemed a minor victory for the Union as Lee retreated by the end of the engagements. Grant chased Lee to Petersburg, south of Richmond and began a siege of that city. *The Eagle* reported on June 20th that, "The enemy in their endeavors to re-enforce Petersburg, abandoned their entrenchment in front of Bermuda Hundred."¹⁶ This would be a critical staging ground for the soldiers of the Union Army and many engagements were launched from Bermuda Hundred. One soldier described the action and the hopes of those in the Union Army to *The Eagle*:

It is fight, fight all the time, and about once a day either one side or the other makes a charge, and then the slaughter is awful. But then we are all the time gaining on them, and by-and-by we will be rewarded with entire success. It is sickening and discouraging when we think of the life and wealth it is costing, but when we think of what is to be gained or lost, we say we will be successful, cost what it may.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ "Attack on rebels at Cold Harbor," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (June 3, 1864): 2.

¹⁶ "From Gen. Grant," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (June 20, 1864): 2.

¹⁷ "Correspondence from Grant's Army," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (June 20, 1864): 2.

From the action taken outside of Petersburg came the siege of that city that would run until the end of the war. Yet moral remained high and hope among the soldiers spoke to victory and the belief that it would come. Grant remained in Virginia seeking success against Lee, as Sherman continued his offensive in the South to split the Confederacy in two.

After making headway through Georgia for a month's time, Sherman was finally within striking distance of Atlanta. On July 25th, The Eagle reported in an article titled "A Portion of Atlanta Occupied," that, "Atlanta is not ours yet. Our forces find strong opposition. It seems we are in possession of a part of the city but the enemy hold the rest."¹⁸ This began a siege of Georgia's capital that would last until September. Though, on the 3rd of that month the headlines rang, "Glorious News! Atlanta Ours,"¹⁹ The Eagle exclaimed that, "Gen. Sherman has taken Atlanta: The 20th Corps occupies the city. The main army is on the Macon road near East Point. A battle was fought near that point in which Gen. Sherman was successful."²⁰ Following this victory, however, no information could be discovered of Sherman's movements. However on November 21st it was finally reported that, "Advice from the Army of the Potomac report the rebels yesterday refused to exchange papers. This is considered an indication that Sherman is successfully accomplishing his movements. The rebels never have suppressed news unfavorable to us."²¹ The Confederacy had attempted to conceal what was happening in the south following the victory in Atlanta. However, more news trickled in such as, "A private in Gen. Sherman's army... says that every man had been supplied with two pairs of shoes, and that the general preparations were for a sixty days' campaign; but none of the men knew the destination of the

¹⁸ "A Portion of Atlanta Occupied," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (July 25, 1864): 2.

¹⁹ "Glorious News! Atlanta Ours!," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (September 3, 1864): 2.

²⁰ "Gen. Sherman has taken Atlanta," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (September 3, 1864): 2.

²¹ "From Gen. Sherman," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (November 21, 1864): 2.

army.”²² This, we know today, began Sherman’s infamous “March to the Sea” campaign, however.

As Sherman advanced, no one appeared to know what the destination of the campaign was but some speculated Charleston, Savannah and several other Georgian and South Carolina cities. The day following Christmas, December 26th, *The Eagle* ended that speculation and divulged Sherman’s whereabouts. The headlines read, “A Christmas Gift to the President. Savannah Ours!”²³ Sherman’s wrote to the President that day and simply said, “To His Excellency, President Lincoln: I beg to present you a Christmas gift the City of Savannah,” and the March to the Sea campaign was complete.²⁴ After his victory in Georgia, Sherman altered his course and began marching up the coastline. His target was the South Carolina capital, though many in Charleston fled as well.²⁵ In February of 1865 this all culminated in peace commissioners passing through the front lines and the Army of the Potomac in order to travel to Washington to discuss terms.²⁶ However, peace negotiations would fail and lead to further military action.

Later that month *The Eagle* reported great news to the public. On February 20th, “The announcement of the occupation of Columbia, S.C., by Gen. Sherman, and the probably evacuation of Charleston, has been communicated to the War Department,” stated E.M. Stanton, the Secretary of War.²⁷ Following this victory by the Union forces, Fort Sumter was taken as mass evacuations from Charleston took place and the Army and Navy were able to move in.²⁸ The victory was symbolic for the Union as the place where the first shots were heard from had

²² *Ibid.*

²³ “A Christmas Gift to the President. Savannah Ours!,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (December 26, 1864): 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ “Sherman marching on Charleston,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (February 2, 1865): 2.

²⁶ “The Peace Commissioners,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (February 2, 1865): 2.

²⁷ “Columbia Ours,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (February 20, 1865): 2.

²⁸ “The Evacuation of Charleston: Historic Sumter Ours.,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (February 21, 1865): 2.

been captured and undoubtedly signified the end of the war. However, one major obstacle remained for the Union: General Robert E. Lee.

Once the victory in the south seemed complete, the Virginia campaign accelerated and General Grant began an offensive with the Army of the Potomac.²⁹ The move by Grant forced Lee's strategic retreat from Petersburg³⁰ and Richmond and on April 4th, Union forces entered the capital.³¹ **"The Rebel Capital Taken"** screamed the headlines in *The Eagle* on that day as a general within Grant's Army, G. Weitzel, exclaimed, "WE TOOK RICHMOND.... THE ENEMY LEFT IN GREAT HASTE."³² It was a momentous moment for the Union as, "Gen. Grant started early this morning...to cut off Lee's retreating army," and, "President Lincoln has gone to the front."³³ The following day Lincoln sat in Jefferson Davis' chair in the Confederate White House for a few moments.³⁴ However, the most exciting news *The Eagle* would report would come days later.

On April 10th, 1865, readers of *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* saw, on the second page, a great Eagle stretched across the top of the page grasping a banner in its talons exclaiming, "Let the Eagle Scream!!"³⁵ The headlines underneath the screaming Eagle spoke everything that needed to be said on that day:

"God has saved the Union!"³⁶

"The Army of the Potomac Conquers."³⁷

²⁹ "Gen Grant's Army in Motion," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (April 1, 1865): 2.

³⁰ "Petersburg Surrendered," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (April 3, 1865): 2.

³¹ "The Rebel Capital Taken," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (April 4, 1865): 2.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ "Abraham dwelleth in Jeff's Mansion," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (April 5, 1865): 2.

³⁵ *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (April 10, 1865): 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

“Gen. LEE Surrenders.”³⁸

“Closing of the War.”³⁹

General Ulysses S. Grant sent the message to Secretary of War Stanton, “**GENERAL LEE SURRENDERED THE ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA** this afternoon upon the terms proposed by myself.”⁴⁰ Lee had surrendered his army, though not because he felt he was beaten, as he told Grant, but because he saw that strategically and logistically it would make no sense to continue fighting.⁴¹ The Civil War was all but over and a victorious Union celebrated.

Though, merely days following the historic surrender of Lee, the worst news to strike the Union since the shots fired on Sumter, since the invasions of the north and threats to the U.S. capital, was headlined in *The Eagle*. On April 15th they simply read, “Awful News! President Lincoln Assassinated,”⁴² and, “He is Dying.”⁴³ The report was as such,

“This evening...at Ford’s Theatre, the President...was shot by an assassin, who suddenly...approached behind the President./The wound is mortal. The President has been insensible ever sincein was inflicted. He is now dying.”⁴⁴

John Wilkes Booth, a Southern sympathizer had shot Lincoln and escaped from the theatre; the following day Lincoln died and the Presidency was passed on to Andrew Johnson. Weeks following the assassination of the President, *The Eagle* reported that John Wilkes Booth has been shot to death when he refused surrender to Union troops participating in the manhunt for him. He had opened fire on the troops before being shot to death.⁴⁵

During this harrowing period for the Union the Civil War was not officially over as another manhunt ensued. The search for the Confederate President had been undertaken

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ “Closing of the War,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (April 10, 1865): 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² “Awful News! President Lincoln Assassinated,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (April 15, 1865): 2.

⁴³ “He is Dying,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (April 15, 1865): 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ “Capture of J Wilkes Booth and Herold,” *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (April 28, 1865): 2.

following General Lee's surrender and finally on May 15th the, "Capture of Jeff Davis," was reported by Lt. Col. B.D. Pritchard of the 4th Michigan Cavalry.⁴⁶ He stated, "I have the honor to report that at daylight yesterday...I surprised and captured Jeff Davis and family together, with staff."⁴⁷ With his capture the remaining Confederate forces began to surrender and on May 29th, the largest remaining contingent of the Southern units surrendered to the Union.⁴⁸ The Civil War had effectively ended and the period of Reconstruction under Johnson began.

The Civil War was a defining moment for the United States as it pitted a nation against itself. The war ended slavery in America and preserved the Union but at the cost of property, the economy and most notably, many lives. New York and the Hudson River Valley were key forces during the Civil War, from troop mustering to massive riots and finally to the soldiers on the front, who wrote and described what they encountered and their own experiences of the war. The Poughkeepsie Eagle Weekly and Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle helped in the process of reporting the war to the community and without these sources it could not be known what the feelings of the war were and how the loss of life affected those on the home front. The Civil War tore the country apart for four years and the Hudson River Valley was a part of it from the beginning to its fruition.

⁴⁶ "Capture of Jeff Davis," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (May 15, 1865): 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ "Surrender of Kirby Smith's Army," *The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* (May 29, 1865): 2.

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