



Abe the Civil War Eagle

By

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***“Majestic Monarch of the clouds
To thee it was given,
To hover in the sulphur smoke,
To ward away the battle stroke.
From Bunker Hill to Heartbreak Ridge
You saw the long lines come gleaming on,
Ere yet life’s blood, warm and wet,
Had dimmed the glistening bayonet,
And saw OLD GLORY shine afar,
Like a rainbow on the clouds of war.”***

Dedicated to Old Abe 1946 – Author Unknown

Old Abe, to my knowledge, is probably the most famous eagle that ever lived, from a tall pine nest to the battlegrounds of the Civil War his character and courage, lives on.

One of the reasons Old Abe was of interest to me was because, nearly everywhere we look, whether it be on courthouses, federal buildings, libraries, flagpoles, or schools, we often see the emblem of the eagle. Why is that?

Our national bird, since the declaration of our Independence was the eagle, but I also know that before the Civil War, there were few places that displayed the emblem of the eagle. You might find it on a tavern sign, soldier's buttons and money, but not like we see it in use today.

That question sent me on a quest, and I was very surprised to discover that there was an answer. That the "true" popularity of the eagle emblem came into use from the Civil War story of Old Abe the War Eagle.

I hope you enjoy this fascinating story! - Janie Lynn Panagopoulos

SPECIAL THANKS

I wish to thank the people at the Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Veterans Museum & Archives, Madison, Wisconsin and the Michigan State Library and Archives, Lansing, Michigan. Without the help of their learned reference librarians and archivists, I probably would still be buried in journals, interviews, articles, oral histories and clippings from the past. – Janie Lynn Panagopoulos

OVERVIEW

The War Eagle

As the most defining event of our American history, the Civil War burned like a fever through the 34 states of our divided nation and a call to arms was sounded. Young farm boys who had never been farther than their fenced fields volunteered their strengths and passions, flooding enlistment offices, making their mark and preparing for an unimaginable adventure with danger.

In Wisconsin, a state that had only recently joined the union, in 1848, the call to arms was answered by emigrant farmers, as young and green as the state they represented. Leaving home, hearth, mothers and wives they courageously shouldered their patriotic duty.

One man, too crippled to serve, offered the regiment of Eau Claire a young American bald eagle to serve in his place, as a mascot, and a reminder to *Billy Yank* and *Johnny Reb* that we are all of one nation.

The eagle, captured from a pine nest along the Flambeau River in April 1861 by a young Ojibwa Indian, grew to know its own strength and quickly became a nuisance. Traded by the Indians for a bushel of seed corn to a farmer, it became no less cantankerous, but soon, under the care of the men of the 8th Wisconsin Volunteers the bird was adopted into the service of the Union cause. Aptly named, Old Abe, after the president, the eagle reluctantly took his place in the Color Guard beside the regimental flag and the Stars and Stripes.

Over the next few years with the patience and kindness of several eagle bearers who trained, fed and protected Old Abe the bird began to play his role as

a true symbol of unity for the men. This eagle mascot helped the men to focus their emotions and direct their obligation to duty. Old Abe, it was said, gave the northern army the moral boost it desperately needed.

This Wisconsin troop, soon assigned to the Army of the Mississippi, was nicknamed the Eagle Brigade and engaged in 37 battles and skirmishes through three fierce years of fighting. Old Abe, at the head of his troops was known on the battlefields of Fredericktown, Corinth, Vicksburg, Richmond, Hurricane Creek and many others.

Old Abe inspired courage and bravery towards the clear cause of a unified America. His appearance on the battlefield was said to be “perfectly magnificent”.

“At the sound of the bugle, he would spring forward, spread his wings and utter a startling scream of victory, heard and glorified by all. The fiercer and louder the storm of battle, the more piercing and inspiring were his calls.”

Once, during the battle of Corinth, his tether cut by bullets, Old Abe soared high above the battleground calling out in anger, his piercing screams encouraging northern troops to charge. Their success that day over the superior Rebel forces prompted Confederate Generals to place a bounty on the “Yankee Buzzard’s” head which stood throughout the war.

Luckily, the bounty was never collected and even after Old Abe’s formal retirement from service he continued as a patriotic symbol, helping to re-build our broken nation. His very presence was even said to have influenced the first

election of Ulysses S. Grant for president. Over the remainder of his life, Old Abe served by helping to raise money for war charities such as veteran's hospitals, orphanages and Civil War memorials.

Howell, Michigan

October 22, 1879

To His Excellency, Governor of Wisconsin,

**Our school is desirous of knowing the fate of "Old Abe"
the eagle of your State that went through the late war.**

Will you be so kind as to favor us with the information?

**Very Respectfully,
Emma E. Foster,
Howell School**



Flambeau River

CHAPTER ONE

Old Abe the War Eagle

April 1861

A bald eagle leaps majestically from the rim of her pine nest soaring high above the broad Flambeau River in northern Wisconsin. Its dark wings spread wide on a gentle breeze, while fierce golden eyes scan the water below, watching, waiting...

Suddenly, something catches her attention. Circling low, folding her wings, she dives through the air, spreading her tail feathers and arching her back. Her razor sharp talons aimed, stabbing into the icy water, she pulls out a large fish from beneath the surface of the river.

Carrying the fish homeward, she soon makes her way to the tree top nest near the water's edge, where two hungry eaglets wait for her return.

Silently, in the shadows of the forest, a young Ojibwa Indian, named Sky, watches from his hiding place as the mighty spirit bird comes to rest in her nest above him.

Silently removing his moccasins he stands on a cushion of soft, fragrant, pine needles and waits.

Above, the mother eagle yanks flesh from her catch and feeds her young, who soon grow full and pull away to rest.

A shrill cry calls from above, drawing the mother eagle's attention. There, on the warm spring breeze, soars the father eagle, calling out for his mate. Leaping from the nest into the currents of air she flies away to join him.

"You should hurry! The eagles will not think it is good you are taking their young," whispered a raspy old voice from below. It was Little Bee, Sky's father and chief of the Flambeau River tribe.

Sky also wonders, in his heart, if what he is doing, taking the young of such a great, proud, spirit bird was a good idea, but his family shares reservation land in what the white man now calls the state of Wisconsin. And with so many families living so close in a reservation, it is hard to hunt and trap for the winter season's needs.

Over the last two winters, many from his tribe have gone hungry. The young eaglets from this nest, if trained properly, could be traded to the settlers for seed or grain to help with their wants for the coming winter.

The settlers that now come to farm this land, that was once Indian hunting grounds, call themselves Americans. These people, too, know the greatness of the eagle, the great spirit bird, and have also made it a symbol of their unity and strength.

Climbing high into the branches of the pine, Sky carries with him an empty sack across his shoulder and his pouch of kinnikinnick tied to his belt. Above him, Sky could hear young birds squawking in their nest.

Pulling his body from one branch to the next, Sky soon stands high in the mighty pine gazing into the nest. It was large enough to hold a man and was filled with fish scales, fur and bones, reeking of decayed flesh and urine. There, peering up, from inside the nest were two eaglets with great dark round eyes, their down fluttering in the spring breeze.

For many sunsets, since the time of the cattails, he had watched the great mother spirit bird bring her offerings of fish and rabbit to her tiny young, so they would grow strong. Their once bald bodies were now covered with a thick, soft gray down that matched the shadows of the forest.

Adjusting his weight on the branch, Sky reaches down to open the pouch hanging from his belt, carefully pouring dry Kinnikinnick into his hand, he yanks the pouch closed.

Taking the mixture of dried sacred plants and herbs, he slowly scatters it upon the nest, the eaglets and into the air, making an offering of thanks to the Great Spirit for the gift of these tiny creatures.

The baby birds hiss and puff out their chests, fearlessly pecking at him, trying to scare Sky from their nest. Smiling at the courage and spirit of these tiny winged ones, and carefully avoiding sharp talons and tiny beaks, Sky places them, one at a time, into his soft deerskin sack.

Sky now notices that one of the eaglets is much smaller and weaker, giving up to Sky's touch, while the other is larger and stronger, fighting like a warrior, pecking and nipping at Sky's hand.

"You must hurry," called Little Bee from below. "The mother will return soon. She will not be happy."

Quickly, Sky climbed down into the arms of the pine with his gifts from the Great Spirit safely in his deerskin sack.

After pulling on his moccasins, he slowly opens his sack to show his father the tiny birds.

"They will bring food to our table come this winter," said Little Bee with a smile.



Ahgamahwezhig - Chief Sky



CHAPTER TWO

The Village

Sky and Little Bee showed the tiny winged ones to the people of their village as they drew near and praised the Great Spirit for such wonderful gifts that will grow to feed the bellies of their children. Indeed, gifts such as this would bring two sacks of dried corn to their tribe.

Pleased, Sky and Little Bee smiled with gratefulness but knew it would take many weeks of work before the eaglets would be ready to leave their village nest.

In their lodge, Sky took a large woven basket and lined it with soft green moss and grasses from the marsh and placed the birds inside. He took part of his meal of fish and chewed it, spitting it out to help feed the tiny birds. The birds ate all he had and wanted more.

Sky fed the eaglets as much and as often as he could. As the days turned to weeks, he watched the larger of the two birds grow bigger and stronger, his soft downy feathers began to turn dark brown and speckled, his claws grew long and sharp and his wings grew strong. But the other eaglet remained small and weak, always willing to give up his food to his brother.

Sky worried but knew it would be up to the spirit of the bird if he would grow strong and live. He was a weak and timid creature from the time he was in the nest, and now he did not thrive or seem to desire to grow strong.

One morning, Sky awoke to a loud, piercing cry from the basket nest and the fluttering of wings. There he found the smaller of the birds had given his spirit back to Mother Earth and lay lifeless and silent. The remaining eaglet flapped his wings and cried, bidding his brother's spirit farewell.

From that moment on, Sky gave all his attention to the remaining bird, as there now would be only one sack of dried corn to help feed his people this winter.

As the bird grew stronger, his demand for food also grew. Sky soon brought small rabbits and opossums for the bird no longer needed Sky to chew his food for him. Sometimes the meal Sky brought was not enough, and the bird would try to peck at his fingers, pinching them with his strong beak until it brought blood. Sky grew to be very careful when he fed the bird. He knew he must teach him to eat gently or no farmer would want to have him for a companion for fear of his powerful crooked beak and claws.

The eaglet's soft, feathery down was now gone and long feathers began to form straight and smooth. They were now a deeper shade of the forest, with dark and light spots, like the sun would make as it danced between the branches of the trees.

Sky tore strips of cloth from a worn red blanket and made a long leash for the bird. Carefully tying one end of it around the eagle's leg, he soon taught the bird

to follow him, hopping around the village. He also taught him to beg for his food, sit silently until commanded to move and then spread his great wings, throwing back his head and calling out with the cry of a brave warrior.

As the eaglet grew, many times he tried to leap into the air and fly, beating his wings until it stirred up so much dust that it left Sky blinking, his eyes filled with tears.

Little Bee carved a gift of a wooden perch that resembled the branches of a great pine and soon the eaglet sat on it and looked down upon all the village, blinking his golden eyes and watching all that passed.

Sky had grown attached to his beautiful spirit bird, but he knew it was not a good idea. The days had grown long into summer, and soon it would be time to take the bird to the white man's settlement and trade him for their winter food supply.

One day, while Sky was in his lodge, he heard a great commotion in the village. It was caused by the eagle.

"Come look at the winged one," called Little Bee to his son. "See what he has done."

Sky ran from his lodge. He could see the people crowded around the eagle's perch as they smiled and clapped their hands in delight, pointing up into the air.

"Look! He has found his spirit," they called as the bird tried to fly, yanking at its red blanket leash still attached to his perch. The perch wobbled back-and-forth and slowly began to free itself from the ground. Sky grabbed hold just as the wooden staff yanked free.

The once tiny bundle of gray down had indeed found his spirit, pulling mightily against Sky, his leash and perch. Holding with all his might, Sky could feel the power of the eagle as it fought for his freedom and calling out in anger with a tremendous war cry.

Afraid the blanket leash would pull apart, Little Bee helped Sky to carefully bring the great bird back to his perch. The eagle had indeed found his spirit and never again would he be without it.

The village cheered for the bird that had grown to be a strong, beautiful and mighty creature. Many thanks were given to the Great Spirit for such an animal.

The next day, Sky cut strips of animal hide and sewed them together to make a stronger leash of leather to help train the spirit bird to use his wings but not fly away.

The eagle quickly learned the length of his new leash and flew as high as he could, often landing in the branches of nearby trees and staying there until it was time for his meal to be brought to him by his brother, Sky.

Now that his eagle had grown, Sky began to travel to the settlement near Jim Falls along the Chippewa River looking for a new home for the bird. He told the farmers of his great spirit bird and many wanted to see him, but Sky told them they would have to wait until he found the right home for his eagle, there, in the settlement.

It needed to be a home where there was a good hunter, said Sky, as the bird needed much food. That hunter would also need to be a farmer who would give Sky one bag of dried shelled corn to help feed his people for the winter.

CHAPTER THREE

Good-Bye

A crippled farmer, by the name of Dan McCann, from a nearby farm, agreed that if the great spirit bird was as Sky had said, he would give Sky a bushel of dried shelled corn as the price for the bird to make it his pet.

Sky agreed and was happy to make a good deal. He would bring the spirit bird the next day to farmer McCann.

The next morning was cool and gray. It was a sad day. Little Bee, to say “good-bye” to his eagle friend, had gone fishing for him and brought back three speckled brown trout to feed the bird. Little Bee handed the fish one at a time to the bird, who carefully took them from the old man’s hand and tore at their flesh with his great sharp beak. Little Bee was pleased that the bird, only occasionally, nipped and pinched at his fingers. He was a good spirit bird.

Lovingly, Sky groomed the bird’s feathers with oiled hands, talking softly and saying his good-byes to his mighty brother. Sky had done his best so the eagle would grow strong and powerful, so he would hold his head with pride, blinking his golden eyes and beating his mighty wings.

Sky hoped this beautiful creature, a gift from the Great Spirit would remind the white men of the strength and pride of the Native people who once walked this land the settlers now call America and would be a symbol of pride and hope for all people.

As Sky walked towards the settlement carrying the perch, the eagle hopped along behind him on his long leather leash. As they neared the small settlement,

Sky could see many people had gathered to greet the great, spirit bird. Sky put out his arm, with a rabbit pelt wound carefully around it for protection, and the eagle flew to Sky's arm and sat as the people slowly gathered to admire his beauty.

Sky tapped the staff of the wooden perch into the ground and the eagle leaped from Sky's arm and flew to the perch.

The farmers were impressed by the bird's appearance. His brown speckled feathers told everyone he was still young and in his first season of life. It would take time before his feathers would turn deep brown and his head as white as snow. Then this bird would be truly magnificent.

The eagle with his bright, round, golden eyes jerked his head around, looking at the crowd that grew around him. As if truly enjoying the attention, he puffed out his chest and spread his wide wings, calling out his loud warrior cry.

Everyone cheered.

"What an eagle!" said one man.

"He makes me proud to be an American," said another.

Sky smiled. He knew his eagle made him proud to be Indian, too.

In an instant, the bird leaped from his perch and with his swift and mighty beating wings flew high into the air to the end of his leash and circled over the heads of the farmers. He then swooped down so low he nearly touched their hats.

"Whatcha gonna name him, McCann?" asked on farmer.

“Old Abe, after our great president, Abe Lincoln. He’s a war eagle, too,” answered farmer McCann with a proud smile.

“That’s a good name. A real spirited name!” he responded.

“I’ll take him!” agreed farmer McCann to Sky. “You will have your sack of dried corn.”

Sky smiled and gently brought the bird back to his perch. A sack of dried corn, at that moment, did not seem like much to Sky to trade for his beautiful spirit bird. But in the winter when his stomach was empty and hunger came to his people, it would save the life of his father and himself and with every mouthful, he would be grateful for the gift of his mighty brother.

Farmer McCann offered his hand to guarantee the deal and Sky accepted it with a shake.

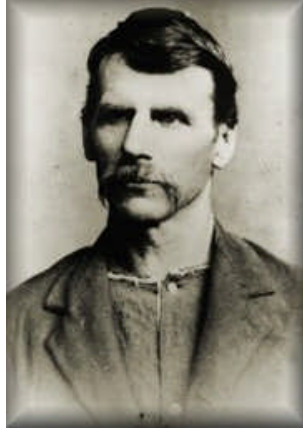
Slowly, Sky recited the foods the eagle would eat. He also told farmer McCann of his commands and the many amazing things the eagle could do. Finally, he asked that the farmer honor and respect the bird, as he was a strong and proud animal warrior that needed to be appreciated and loved.

Farmer McCann smiled with agreement, as he knew the stories of the great spirit bird as McCann’s wife was an Ojibwa Indian, too.

“The bird will be honored”, said Farmer McCann as he reached out gently and stroked the bird’s head. “I’ll take right good care of Old Abe.”

Sky was satisfied the farmer was a good man, and he was happy that the man’s wife was an Ojibwa woman; she would help the farmer look after the bird.

Slowly, Sky said good-bye and turned away, knowing he would never see his spirit bird again.



Dan McCann, Contributed by Cathryn Vogwill

CHAPTER FOUR

The Farm

When farmer McCann brought the eagle home to his farm, his wife was amazed by her husband's gift. But she was also afraid for the safety of her children, knowing the wild nature of the bird.

"This spirit bird is very beautiful," she said, "but it is also bigger than the children!"

And indeed, when the eagle spread his wings he was nearly as wide as a man is tall.

"It must stay in the barn and the children must never feed the bird without your help."

Farmer McCann understood his wife's concerns and promised to watch over the children and the bird. He would keep Old Abe in the barn and take him out into the fields to spread his wings at the end of his leash every day.

Farmer McCann loved his bird and taught him many new tricks, like how to fetch a ball and even how to dance when he played his fiddle.

Old Abe was particularly fond of the tune, *Bonaparte's Retreat* and would pace back-and-forth at the end of his leash, bobbing its head up-and-down and marching its feet while McCann played his fiddle, For many hours the family shared the fun and companionship of the spirit bird and Mrs. McCann grew fond of their pet, too. (hear *Bonaparte's Retreat* at:

http://www.archive.org/details/Tom_Joad_Bonapartes_Retreat)

As time passed, Old Abe grew stronger and larger. He now demanded two rabbits a day for each meal. Farmer McCann soon taught his young son to help him care for the bird. The two of them were kept busy hunting, trapping and bringing in the harvest, while the eagle grew, demanding more and more food and more and more attention.



Old Abe at 11 months

One morning, while farmer McCann and his son were out hunting for Old Abe's breakfast, his young daughter decided to visit the bird, all by herself. She had heard the bird squawking and crying for its food, and she wanted to give him a piece of bread she had left from her morning meal. She had watched her father and brother feed the great bird, many times, and now, she too, wanted to help.

As she slowly opened the big barn doors, she could see the eagle sitting on his perch in the middle of the barn. Silently, Old Abe stared at the little curly-haired girl as she approached, her long skirts rustling in the straw and her long curls bobbing up-and-down. Old Abe crooked his neck and his big golden eyes grew wide.

Carefully, reaching out her tiny hand to Old Abe, she offered him her crust of bread.

Instantly, Old Abe sprang from his perch, fluttering his giant wings in the little girl's face and with his mighty claws grabbed hold of the bread along with the little girl's hand.

Hearing her daughter's loud screams, Mrs. McCann rushed into the barn with her broom. Old Abe flew to the safety of the loft as Mrs. McCann swung the broom in the air above her head trying to protect her daughter. With great cries and squawks and ruffled feathers, Old Abe looked down at Mrs. McCann in confusion.

Mrs. McCann grabbed up her terrified daughter and rushed out of the barn and into the house to bandage her bleeding hand.

When farmer McCann and his son returned from hunting, Mrs. McCann insisted, "The bird is no longer welcome here! It is too spirited and dangerous of a pet for a farm."

Sadly, Dan knew his wife was right. Old Abe was too spirited for a farm. Ever since the bird arrived, his chickens laid fewer eggs, his cows gave less milk and his dogs hid in fright every time the great bird spread his wings and flew at the end of his leash.

Old Abe needed a new home, but it couldn't be just any home. It had to be special, a place where he would be well taken care of and where he would get plenty of food and plenty of attention. A bird with that much spirit needed a very special place to call home.

Farmer McCann spoke with his wife, and they finally decided, together, that since he had a crippled leg and could not serve in the new Union Army, now

being formed to fight in the War Between the States, perhaps Old Abe could serve in his place.

Captain John Perkins, once a shop-keeper and friend of McCann's, who lived in a nearby settlement, and was now organizing a group of men from Wisconsin to become soldiers in the Civil War.

Farmer McCann and his wife knew that each regiment of men that was organized to go off to war had a mascot. A mascot was supposed to be an animal that would inspire the men by lifting their spirits and share in their pride when they succeeded. Old Abe would make a perfect mascot.



New York Illustrated News, October 14, 1861, p. 370

CHAPTER FIVE

Regimental Bird

Captain Perkins, who had organized the men from Eau Claire for Company C of the 8th Wisconsin Volunteer infantry, was soon visited by McCann.

Upon seeing the eagle, Captain Perkins was doubtful about using the bird as a mascot as he knew how difficult it would be to care for such a wild and spirited animal. He had already tried other animals as a mascot and none had worked out.

However, seeing the excitement upon the faces of his young recruits when they looked at Old Abe, Captain Perkins was willing to give it a try. After all, it was the symbol of America and with a name like Old Abe, it had to be a good choice.

Captain Perkins shook hands with McCann and agreed to accept the bird as their mascot. McCann was very happy as he now knew he had played a part in supporting the Union Army of the North in the Civil War.

The men grew afraid of Old Abe because he was so spirited and strong and they would no longer volunteer to feed him as he would spread his wings and

flutter them in the men's faces and pull skin from their fingers while grabbing at the food.

Finally, James McGinnis, a stout young man of 18 was assigned the job of "eagle bearer" to care for Old Abe. McGinnis, who wasn't afraid of the bird, was bound and determined he would train their mascot to behave itself. He first tried to march with Old Abe on his arm and found he was too heavy to carry comfortably and Old Abe would often turn and hiss in McGinnis' face.

McGinnis next tried to carry Old Abe on his shoulder, only to discover Old Abe's wings were much too big, and he also liked to spread them in McGinnis' face while trying to yank the cap from his head.

Checking Old Abe's weight and measurements, McGinnis discovered the bird weighed 36 pounds and had a wingspan of seven feet.

McGinnis then tried to march with Old Abe's perch, but the bird's droppings kept soiling his arm and the sleeve of his uniform.

Finally, a red, white, and blue perch was made with a slanted shield to protect McGinnis's arm. From then on, Old Abe sat upon his beautiful perch and became part of the regiment as they marched. He still tried to frighten the men and steal their caps, but McGinnis made sure Old Abe was given enough food to make him peaceful.

From Eau Claire, Company C soon left for Madison, Wisconsin, to join the 8th Wisconsin Volunteers. The War Between the States was now becoming very serious. The troops from Wisconsin were commanded to follow the Mississippi

River Campaign that kept the nation's longest water highway open to the north, protecting the unity of America and fighting for the freedom of slaves.

When the company entered Madison, a crowd of town's people gathered to see the many men who were going to fight for the union of America. There were thousands of soldiers there, all with their mascots. There were dogs, goats, raccoons, badgers, and even some half-grown bears, but no other regiment had an eagle.

The crowd cheered for Old Abe and the 8th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry.

"Hurrah for Old Abe and the boys from Eau Claire!" cried the crowd.

"Hurrah for Old Abe, the symbol of America!"

McGinnis noticed Old Abe was becoming upset and scared by the crowd and the sounds of the mules braying and the horse hooves pounding upon the bricked streets. Old Abe began pecking at the leather leash tied around his ankle. McGinnis loosened the leash in his hand and Abe spread his wings, puffed out his chest and hissed at the noise and the crowd.

Everyone laughed and cheered at the warrior eagle and the noise grew even louder.

A flag man carrying the American flag marched beside Old Abe in the Color Guard. The flag snapped and fluttered in the wind, scaring him even more.

Finally, Old Abe leaped from his perch into the air and flew high above the crowd. McGinnis tried to pull him back but thought it would be easier just to give Old Abe his way. The crowd cheered as the symbol of America soared above the troops.

Angry at all the noise and the fluttering of the flag, Old Abe soared towards the flag on its tall pole. Grasping the flag in his beak he pulled and tugged at the American flag, while in flight, yanking the fabric taut, displaying the grand old flag's thirty-four stars and stripes. The crowd went wild with excitement and pride.

"What an American!" they shouted.

"It's a sign – Old Abe and Old Glory!" cried a woman with tears in her eyes.

"It's a true sign that this Uncivil War will be won by the North and there will be freedom for all!"

It indeed was a majestic sight and from that day forward, the 8th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry became known as the Eagle Regiment, led by its high-spirited mascot, Old Abe, the symbol of America's freedom.

Old Abe and Company C were soon given the honor of Color Guard of the 8th Wisconsin. And Old Abe's place of honor for the next three years was to the left of the regimental flag and to the right of Old Glory, leading the men from Wisconsin onto the battlefields of the Civil War.

CHAPTER SIX
Enlisted Eagle

Soon, Old Abe was made an official soldier of the Union Army and sworn in like any other recruit. The men of the 8th Wisconsin put red, white and blue ribbons around Old Abe's neck in recognition of his recruitment. And now, every place Old Abe traveled, he was recognized as a Union soldier with cheers and the waving of flags.

In camp, with the help of eagle bearer McGinnis, the men soon got over their fear of Old Abe and watched in awe as Old Abe would fly around camp and into nearby rivers, from his long tethered leash, where he would fish for his own food.

The men also thought it was great fun to teach him new tricks, like how to pick the right cap that hid a lead bullet and how to play "fetch" when they rolled bullets across the ground. The men all laughed as they watched Old Abe chase after them and catch them in his great claws, squawking in delight and receiving a treat for his efforts.

Finally, Old Abe became friends with his brother soldiers. If he recognized someone who had fed him before, he would reach out and rub his head against the person's hand or cheek, begging for food. He also learned to shake hands by taking a person's finger in his beak and gently shaking it, instead of biting and drawing blood. The men were very happy that Old Abe had finally become their true friend and mascot.

In September, the Eagle Regiment was ordered to march into St. Louis, Missouri. Old Abe, by this time, was getting comfortable with all the attention

from the soldiers and the crowds. But when he got to St. Louis, the cheering group that had gathered was larger than ever and everyone wanted to get a glimpse of Old Abe, a living national symbol.

McGinnis held tight to Old Abe as he marched but Abe, frightened, leaped from his perch into the air stretching at his leash, until it snapped.

Old Abe soared above the troops, the crowd and above the treetops and finally came to rest upon the chimney of a house. McGinnis called to Old Abe to come down, and finally, upon producing some crackers from his pocket was able to bribe him down to the sidewalk.

That night, McGinnis wove Old Abe a new, stronger leash, so he never had to worry about losing Old Abe again.

One day when the men had a long, hard march in the hot sun, McGinnis became worried about Old Abe because there were no creeks or streams for the bird to drink from.

That evening in camp, McGinnis worked with the bird until he taught him how to drink from a canteen. This trick would save Old Abe's life over the next few years of long, hot marches along the Civil War trail.

It was during one of these long marches into the South that Old Abe showed he was one of the soldiers, when a man, tired and bored from marching, began to whistle a tune. Soon, others joined in helping the men find their courage and keep their spirits high while marching closer to the battle-lines. Old Abe, upon hearing their tune, joined in with squawks, shrill whistles and "cooing". The men

of the 8th Wisconsin smiled with encouragement and all joined in to whistle the tune together.

As time passed, Old Abe acquired a new handler by the name of Thomas Hill. Hill, who was a bit afraid of Old Abe, tried to make friends of his new charge by using his hunting skills to provide plenty of fresh meat for Old Abe to enjoy. Because of this Old Abe took a real liking to the taste of squirrel.

Slowly, Thomas Hill and Old Abe become friends, but Hill was always cautious around the bird and never felt truly comfortable.

Old Abe, slowly, now, had grown accustomed to the noise and smells of camp life. When the bugle was blown to call the troops to battle, Old Abe would spread his wings, leaping into the air at the sound of gunfire and the jingle of horse harnesses, circling high above the men, screaming out his war cry for the unity of America. Old Abe, as a soldier himself, worked hard to keep the men's spirit as high as his own.

As more men joined with the Union forces, a new eagle bearer was, again, assigned to Old Abe; his name was David McLain.

McLain, a farmer's son from Menominee, Wisconsin was a serious young man and was very comfortable working with animals and particularly enjoyed Old Abe's company.

McLain spent all of his time working with Old Abe and soon gained the bird's trust.



Old Abe and the Color Guard at Vicksburg July 1863- L. to R.: Ed Homaston, Christopher Darius Gorman, Sgt Ambrose Armitage, (unknown), Myron Riggs and 3 more unknowns

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Battlefield

One day, near Farmington, Mississippi, the Eagle Regiment prepared itself for battle. The troops started to gather on each side and the “boom” and smoke of the cannons began to fill the air.

Old Abe, sitting on his perch, surveyed the movements of the living landscape, his heart beating wildly like any soldier, but he ruffled his feathers, puffed up his chest and shook off his fear. Sitting tall upon his perch, he and the men of the Eagle Regiment fell into formation for battle.

Suddenly, the battle was all around them, the air was alive with battle bullets “whizzing” by, while the captain shouted orders for the men to fall to their bellies on the ground. The Confederate Rebels, now, had their Union enemy pinned down.

Old Abe jumped from his perch to the ground and waited until he heard the sound of the bugle call to re-form. At the bugler’s last note, Abe mounted his perch and led his regiment courageously into battle.

Upon the battlefield, Old Abe took flight, soaring at the end of his leash over the scene of war, screaming fiercely at his Union soldiers below, encouraging them on.

Barely holding their own, the Union troops, on the verge of retreat, were inspired by the sight of Old Abe over the battlefield, urging them on. Soon, this shared inspiration rallied the men to defeat the Confederate forces.

The Confederate soldiers were stunned at the sight of an eagle screaming down at them and leading men into a battle. Soon all the Southern soldiers were talking about Old Abe.

Some called him a “Wild Goose!” and others a “Yankee Buzzard!” Some were afraid of the bird’s reputation as a mighty spirit bird, a warrior, and some even thought Old Abe was magical, casting spells over the battlefield. But most of the Rebel soldiers thought it was just an unlucky sign to see a Northern regiment carrying the symbol of America onto the battlefield. How could the Northern troops be beaten when they had a mascot as powerful as Old Abe the War Eagle?

At the Second Battle of Corinth, Mississippi, in October 1862, Confederate General “Pop” Price ordered his men to, “Get that eagle! We will take Old Abe and along with it, break the Yankee spirit! And if you can’t capture him, shoot him! I’d rather have that one bird than a brigade of Yankee soldiers!”

Old Abe became the target of that battle.

The Confederate soldiers watched carefully for Old Abe. They would take that bird, either for their own or take him away from the Yankees, forever.

Old Abe sat steady upon his perch as the battle burned around him. The flags fluttered in the hot breeze of the “booming” cannons, while smoke from spent gunpowder, gathered low in the valley, making it nearly impossible to observe the mighty, battle below.

Soon a volley of bullets whistled through the air towards the Eagle Regiment. Old Abe, with a mighty leap, sprung from his perch, this time, breaking his tether, allowing him to soar high above the battlefield screeching his warrior cry of defiance.

The fighting grew fiercer and Old Abe circled above the smoke-filled valley, screeching, urging on the Union soldiers and threatening the Confederate troops.

All around, bullets sliced the air, whistling past as he soared above the heads of his men, inspiring them not to lose courage.

Time and time again, the Confederates took aim at Old Abe, but time and time again, they missed. Old Abe soared high, screaming insults at the enemy, just beyond the range of their fire.

At the end of the battle, the Northern troops had held their ground and won the Second Battle of Corinth with the help of Old Abe their mighty war eagle.

When Abe returned to his perch, McLain noticed there was blood dripping from one of Abe’s wings where an enemy bullet, had finally, found its mark.

The men of the Eagle Regiment gathered near their brave friend, to cheer him and thank him for keeping their spirits high during the battle. Old Abe was truly a hero to his men, but now he was a wounded hero.

His wing was bandaged and Old Abe was treated with great honors, being fed his favorite foods by everyone who had food to share. It didn't take long, with all the attention, for Old Abe to be back on his perch leading his men with bravery and courage.



CHAPTER EIGHT

War Hero

Over time, Old Abe's feathers had darkened to a warm, rich, brown color and his head turned white as snow. He took on the appearance of a beautiful, adult, American bald eagle. His magnificent wingspan was awesome to see and when in flight, he gave chills of excitement to both his friends and his enemies.

David McLain, after only a few months of service as an eagle bearer, decided it was too difficult a task to take care of and protect Old Abe and decided to resign from his post. It was at this time, a young German farm boy from Eau Claire by the name of Ed Homaston, became Old Abe's next eagle bearer.

Homaston, originally from Vermont, had moved to Wisconsin with his family shortly before the start of the war. In Eau Claire, he helped to work on the family farm, but what he enjoyed most was working with and training the farm animals.

In the Union Army he had become a blacksmith, where he grew very strong, strong enough to carry Old Abe on his perch into battle.

Having a natural love for animals, it didn't take long for Ed to develop a close relationship with Old Abe. He would perch Abe in his tent at night and spend long hours talking with the bird, telling him about his wonderful ability to inspire men into battle, and also going into great detail explaining to Abe his duties and responsibilities as a mascot for the 8th Wisconsin.

Anyone who saw Old Abe and Ed together had to admit, they were like brothers, with Ed always talking to the bird and encouraging him to mind his manners and to always be brave, while Old Abe looked at Ed, "cooing" and squawking and then following his directions.

In the spring of 1863, in Vicksburg, Mississippi, a town that belonged to the Confederates, there was a great battle and Old Abe and the 8th Wisconsin soldiers were there. It was a terrible battle and while Old Abe was being carried on his perch by Ed, he was grazed in the chest by a bullet.

Not hurt, but angry, Old Abe lunged into the air above the battlefield, still tethered to his perch, shrieking out a war cry. On the ground below, he yanked and pulled Ed and his perch along the ground.

It was lucky for Ed that Old Abe was so strong; because no sooner had Old Abe pulled Ed away from the area he was standing, a volley of Confederate Bullets, aimed right at them both, filled the air. Old Abe had saved Ed Homeston's life and Ed knew it.

At the end of the day, Vicksburg had been successfully taken by the Union troops, and it was a victory for the North.

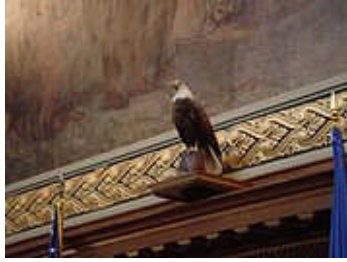
General Ulysses S. Grant, the leader of the Northern army, was very proud of his soldiers that fought at Vicksburg and hosted a party for them to celebrate their victory.

When General Grant rode past his men on his horse, the General, with a glance, gave encouragement and thanks to his brave men for all their hard work and effort, they had shown to win Vicksburg for the Union cause.

When he rode by the Eagle Regiment, however, he paused to admire the beauty of Old Abe, the true symbol of American unity and northern spirit.

Out of respect, General Grant smiled and lifted his cap to honor Old Abe with a salute, a gesture that would be remembered by Old Abe and the men, long after the end of the war.

Old Abe, to return the gesture squawked wildly back at General Grant and fluttered his wings with pride. It was a great day for the Union Army and the Eagle Regiment from Wisconsin.



A replica of Old Abe at the Wisconsin State Assembly Chamber

CHAPTER NINE

Wisconsin State Capitol

Time passed quickly for Old Abe as he served in the Union army from September 1861 until September 1864. In battle after battle, he helped to lead his brave Eagle Regiment and many other Union soldiers forward, encouraging the men, giving them pride, and pushing them onwards to victory. Old Abe was a brave, spirit bird, involved in thirty-seven battles and skirmishes, working with six different eagle bearers and flying over the field of battle into the noise and smoke of Confederate fire, saving a man's life and twice being wounded.

The Civil War ended on April 9, 1865 and the Northern troops led by General Ulysses S. Grant had won the war to save the union of the United States and to free the slaves.

There were many great celebrations that took place throughout the North. There were many parties and balls given and, of course, all war heroes were invited, including Old Abe the War Eagle.

The last time Old Abe marched with the 8th Wisconsin, Eagle Regiment, was at a parade in Madison, Wisconsin to celebrate the end of the War. Old Abe was

proudly carried upon his perch before the cheering crowds that came to see him and the brave soldiers of Wisconsin.

Old Abe, no longer ruffled by the noise of crowds and battlefields, spread his wings and bobbed his head, squawking loudly to the regimental bands as they played the tune of *Yankee Doodle*.

It was now time for Old Abe to finally have a true home. Once again, just any home wouldn't do. After all, he was now a Civil War hero.

The Eagle Regiment was given the opportunity to make the choice for Old Abe as to where he should now go live. Some wanted Old Abe to reside in the White House and sit beside the great man he was named after.

However, the men thought, Washington D.C. was too far away from their homes in Wisconsin for them to pay him a visit and talk over old war memories.

So, it was finally decided, Old Abe would stay right at home, in the State of Wisconsin and be given to Wisconsin's Governor Lewis, where Old Abe would make his home at the Capitol in Madison.

There, Old Abe was treated like a hero and the men from the Eagle Regiment often came to visit their old friend who kept the spirit of the Civil War alive for them.

Old Abe soon earned his keep by being a guest-of-honor at banquets, balls, picnics, parties, patriotic parades, reunions and county fairs. He was also cheered on at the Chicago World's Fair where P.T. Barnum, the greatest showman on Earth, offered to buy Old Abe to put him on public tour throughout the United States, but Old Abe and his American spirit were not for sale.

In 1876, eleven years after the war had ended the state of Wisconsin sent Old Abe to the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition as an ambassador of the State. His job was not just to represent Wisconsin, but also to be a living symbol of the unity and the spirit of America.

In 1880, Old Abe also attended the Republican Convention in Chicago to witness the nomination of his old friend, General Ulysses S. Grant, as a candidate for the presidency of the United States. It was said, General Grant owed Old Abe a debt of gratitude, because if it weren't for Abe attending the Convention, Grant might not have gained enough votes to be elected the 18th president of the United States.

For 17 years, Old Abe lived a happy life in the Wisconsin State Capitol building in Madison. Then, one winter evening in 1881, fire broke out in a pile of painter's rags in the basement, not far from Old Abe's cage. Old Abe screamed his great war cry, alerting the night watchman to the danger.

The watchmen put out the fire while other attendants rushed to free Old Abe from his smoke-filled room. Old Abe's alert watch saved the State capitol from being destroyed by the fire, but Old Abe had breathed in too much of the deadly black smoke and fumes.

Days after the fire, Old Abe still had trouble breathing, he soon lost his appetite, and his beautiful feathers lost their sheen and began to fall out.

Finally, on March 26, 1881, Old Abe the great and mighty War Eagle sadly died in the arms of his keeper.

News of his death spread across the country by telegraph wire and newspaper and, eventually, around the world. In Wisconsin and in many other locations around the country flags flew at half-mast in his honor.

Soon, Union veterans gathered at the Wisconsin State capitol to decide what should be done with Old Abe's lifeless body. Some suggested he be buried with high honors as a war hero at the Veterans Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. However, it was finally decided Old Abe's body would be mounted and kept in a glass case in the state capitol, to remain in his home state for future generations to enjoy as a symbol of our American freedom.

Old Abe was proudly displayed in Wisconsin's State Capitol until 1904, when another fire broke out and totally destroyed the capitol building and everything in it.

Old Abe, the symbol of America's spirit and unity, was the most famous eagle that ever wore a plume of feathers. And even the very feathers (<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/museum/artifacts/archives/001074.asp>) that once grew from his wings and tail, were sold to raise thousands and thousands of dollars to help support wounded veterans, widows and children, and to build veterans hospitals and war memorials.

He has been honored by having books and pamphlets written about him and his likeness photographed, painted, carved in marble, cast in gold, molded in glass and remembered "now" in the hearts of all Americans.

Thus ends the story of Old Abe the War Eagle, who through his own spirit and courage raised the spirit and courage of the Union Army, who fought bravely upon the field of battle to preserve and unify America and give freedom to us all.

Old Abe's Battles

1861:

1) Fredericktown, MO, October 21

1862:

2) New Madrid and Island No. 10, MO - March and April

3) Point Pleasant, MO - March 20

4) Farmington, MS - May 9

5) Corinth, MS - May 28

6) Iuka, MS - September 12

7) Burnsville, MS - September 13

8) Iuka, MS - September 16-18

9) Corinth, MS - October 3-4

10) Tallahatchie, MS - December 2

1863:

11) Mississippi Springs, MS - May 13

12) Jackson, MS - May 14

13) Vicksburg, MS - May 22

14) Mechanicsburg, MS - June 4

15) Richmond, LA - June 15

- 16) Vicksburg, MS - June 24
- 17) Surrender of Vicksburg - July 4
- 18) Brownsville, MS - October 14

1864:

- 19) Fort Scurry, LA - March 13
- 20) Fort de Russey, LA - March 15
- 21) Henderson's Hill, LA - March 21
- 22) Grand Ecore, LA - April 2
- 23) Pleasant Hill, LA - April 8-9
- 24) Natchitoches, LA - April 20
- 25) Kane River, LA - April 22
- 26) Clouterville, LA - April 23
- 27) Crane Hill, LA - April 23
- 28) Bayou Rapids, LA - May 2
- 29) Bayou La Monre, LA - May 3
- 30) Bayou Roberts, LA - May 4-6
- 31) Moore's Plantation, LA - May 8-12
- 32) Mansura, LA - May 16
- 33) Maysville, LA, May 17

- 34) Calhoun's Plantation, LA - May 18
- 35) Bayou de Glaise, LA - May 18
- 36) Lake Chicot, AR - June 6
- 37) Hurricane Creek, MS - August 13

Eagle Bearers

1. James McGinnis, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 09/01/1861—
05/30/1862
2. Thomas J. Hill, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 05/30/1862 –
08/18/1862
3. David McLain, Menomonee, Wisconsin, 08/1862 –
10/1862
4. Edward Homaston, Eau Claire, Wisconsin 10/1862-
09/1863
5. John Buckhardt, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 09/1863-09/1864
6. John T. Hill, Ashland, Wisconsin, 09/1864
7. Ephram Wilcox, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, (dates not known)

Our National Emblem and Bird

The idea of an American bald eagle as our national bird and emblem started when the Second Continental Congress decided in 1776, that we, as a newly forming nation, needed to declare our independence from Great Britain and an official seal was needed to seal our documents.

Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were on the committee chosen to create the seal, but after weeks of work the only thing accepted by the Congress from the committee's suggestions was the phrase: *E Pluribus Unum* (from many – one).

Six years passed and in 1782, a sketch was submitted by Philadelphia artist, William Barton, from there, Charles Thompson, Secretary of the Congress, made some changes to the sketch and the design of an American bald eagle clutching a bundle of arrows in one talon (representing war) and an olive branch in the other (representing peace), was approved to be incorporated into the seal and completed by adding a shield of red and white stripes covering the eagle's breast and a crest above the eagle's head, with a cluster of thirteen stars (representing the original 13 colonies) surrounded by rays of sunlight (representing hope). The eagle also carried in its beak a banner with the original accepted phrase: *E Pluribus Unum*.

It wasn't until 1787, however, that the American bald eagle was officially named as the emblem of the United States and even then there were complaints. Benjamin Franklin wrote:

"I wish that the bald eagle had not been chosen as the representative of our country, he is a bird of bad moral character, he does not get his living honestly, you may have seen him perched on some dead tree, where, too lazy to fish for himself, he watches the labor of the fishing-hawk, and when that diligent bird has at length taken a fish, and is bearing it to its nest for the support of his mate and young ones, the bald eagle pursues him and takes it from him.... Besides, he is a rank coward; the little kingbird, not bigger than a sparrow attacks him boldly and drives him out of the district. He is therefore, by no means a proper emblem for the brave and honest of America. For a truth, the turkey is in comparison a much more respectable bird, and withal a true original native of America . . . A bird of courage, and would not hesitate to attack a grenadier of the British guards, who should presume to invade his farmyard with a red coat on."

It is noted, that the great naturalist and artist, John James Audubon agreed with Franklin.

I am, personally, glad that Old Abe the War Eagle proved Dr. Franklin and Mr. Audubon's opinions to be false.

Why the Eagle as an Emblem?

“It is said that the eagle was used as a national emblem because, at one of the first battles of the Revolution (which occurred early in the morning) the noise of the struggle awoke the sleeping eagles on the heights, and they flew from their nests and circled about over the heads of the fighting men, all the while giving vent to their raucous cries. “They are shrieking for Freedom,” said the patriots.

Thus the eagle, full of the boundless spirit of freedom, living above the valleys, strong and powerful in his might, has become the national emblem of a country that offers freedom in word and thought and an opportunity for a full and free expansion into the boundless space of the future. —Maude M. Grant – poet

Glossary

Capitol: A building where the state or federal legislature conducts business.

Centennial: One-hundredth anniversary

Civil war: A war between citizens of the same country. The American Civil War, 1861-1865, was fought between the southern states (the Confederacy), which wanted to form a separate country, and the northern states (the Union), which wanted America to remain united.

Color guard: Members of the armed forces who carry the flags in review or parade.

Company: A military unit made up of 100 men led by a captain and two lieutenants.

Confederate: In the Civil War, the Confederate States of America (also called the Confederacy) were the 11 southern states that seceded from (separated from) the United States, intending to form a separate country. They elected Jefferson Davis as their president.

Grant, Ulysses S.: 1822-1885. Civil War general commanding all Union troops. He became the 18th president of the United States in 1868.

Half-mast: To lower a flag half-way down its mast as a sign of respect for someone who has died.

Kinnikinnick: A mixture of dried leaves, roots, and tobacco that is either smoked or scattered by Native Americans as a blessing or prayer.

Lincoln, Abraham: 1809 – 1865. The 16th president of the United States. He served in office during the Civil War and was assassinated five days after the Confederacy surrendered.

Mascot: A person or thing believed to bring good luck as a group's representative.

Ojibwa: A large Native American tribe made up of many different groups in the area that are now Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, and parts of Canada.

Old Glory: A nickname for the American flag.

Rebel: During the Civil War, a term for Confederate soldiers; sometimes also called Rebs or Johnny Reb.

Regiment: A military unit consisting of 10 companies (each company had 100 men), led by a colonel, and named with a state and a number.

Republican Convention: A Republican political party assembly held to officially name the party's candidate for the presidential election.

Reservation: A tract of land designated by the federal government as Native American land.

Retreat: A act of withdrawing, especially from a dangerous situation.

Union: In the Civil War, the northern states that fought to keep the United States together. They wanted to prevent the southern states (the Confederacy) from forming a separate country.

Volunteer infantry: Foot soldiers who joined the army after the war started.

They joined voluntarily to fight the war; they were not drafted and they were not career soldiers.

War Between the States: Another name for the American Civil War. Other names that have sometimes been used include War of the Rebellion, War of Secession, Mr. Lincoln's War, the Uncivil War, and the Brothers' War

Yankee: During the Civil War, a term for Union soldiers: sometimes also called Yanks or Billy Yanks.

Note: William Whipple Warren, an authority on Chippewa language and history, gives the name of Sky's father as Ah-mous instead of Ah-monse and states that the name means "**Little Bee**".

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http://museum.dva.state.wi.us/News_Releases/oldabe0404.asp

Search Old Abe at Wisconsin's Veterans Museum

Screaming Eagles: <http://www.screamingeagle.org/oldabe.htm>

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Historic Marker: <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=13984>

You Tube Eagle Cam

http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=EBDFF12734B5970D&search_query=eagle+nest+1&rclk=pti

Lac du Flambeau Intertribal Council <http://www.glitc.org/pages/ldfblsc.html>

This 10 1/2 foot eagle was erected in remembrance of "OLD ABE". It is located near the NSP Power Station on the banks of the Chippewa River in Jim Falls, Wisconsin.

