

A Year of Victory

“Keep pegging away” was the advice of President Abraham Lincoln when questioned about a vital war problem early in the year of 1863 — the year that was to mark the turning point in the great struggle between the North and South.

Probably no State adhered to Lincoln's slogan more faithfully than Iowa. Throughout the gloomy war year of 1862 the Hawkeye State reacted to the southern victories by sending large numbers of volunteers into the Union army. Twenty-two infantry regiments plunged into the conflict to stem the tide of Southern victory. The Second Iowa Infantry led Grant's forces into Fort Donelson in one of the few Northern victories of that dark year. The battle of Shiloh a few weeks later was particularly painful to the Northern cause, but it was a tragic shock to Iowans who learned that one-fourth of the ten thousand casualties befell their own regiments. Undaunted by this blow, many men came in from the fields to join the ranks and fight side by side with their fathers, brothers, and sons.

The thought of being drafted was extremely distasteful to most Iowans and as a result the

measures for compulsory military service were not applied in the State during the first three years of the war. By the close of 1862 almost one-half of the total male population of Iowa had volunteered.

Gloom hung heavily over Iowa in December of 1862 when the Federal Army of the Potomac was defeated in the battle of Fredericksburg. The North learned that 25,620 soldiers had been killed in checking the north-bound Confederates at South Mountain and Antietam. In addition to this bad news, there were persistent reports that European powers were preparing to recognize the Confederacy. Nevertheless, Iowa steadfastly observed Lincoln's admonition to "keep pegging away".

With the first day of January, 1863, came a wave of optimism. President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The announcement was received enthusiastically in the first free State west of the Mississippi. Rallies were held in Des Moines, Burlington, Muscatine, and Mount Pleasant. Freedom of the slaves clarified the purpose of the war and renewed the determination to win the conflict. It seemed, early in January, that Vicksburg would soon be captured, thereby opening the Mississippi River and cutting the Confederacy in twain.

The wave of optimism soon subsided, however.

Vicksburg did not fall, and emancipation had little practical effect. The chief aim of loyal Iowa editors during the winter lull in the fighting was to buoy up the spirits of their readers who were listening, all too often, to faint-hearted folks and Copperheads who were creating dissension in the North. "Were we asked what is the greatest evil of the day," warned the *Iowa City Republican*, "we should answer not the rebellion as it now exists — not the prospect of foreign intervention in our affairs — not the loss of our brave soldiery, these are evils, unmixed evils, but a greater than any one of these lies in the Tory heads and hearts of Editors (and other people) who rise early and sit up late to sow schism and discord among the loyal people of the north . . . who leave no stone unturned to create disaffection in the army and disunion in the councils of the nation. They seek with devilish invention to distract and divide the people, thus hoping and expecting to paralyze the great loyal arm of the nation".

There were, of course, some Iowans, patriotic but tired after two years of bloodshed, who were saying, "What's the use? I guess it won't pay. Hadn't we better back down, and let the rebels have their own way?" A few newspapers were denouncing Lincoln and asking for the cessation of hostilities. But loyal editors constantly empha-

sized the duty of every individual to stand behind the President and to aid "the brave soldiers who have buckled on their armor in defence of the Government and the country!" Leaders with faith in the Union urged the discouraged people to "hold on — the end will come and amply compensate the sacrifice."

While victory-starved Iowans were awaiting good news of their "boys" locked in battle at Vicksburg and on other southern battlefields it became popular to hold mass meetings for the purpose of uniting people of different party affiliations in support of the Union cause. One of the largest of these was held at Iowa City on March 12th. Chief speakers for the afternoon and evening affair were Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood, Hiram Price, C. C. Cole, and W. H. T. Gurley. These men helped to revive the lagging spirits of their listeners. They denounced the Copperheads and forecast victories for Union armies after a year of despair and defeat.

When false news came on April 8th that the important Rebel stronghold of Charleston had been captured, all Iowa temporarily forgot the battles of Bull Run, Shiloh, and Fredericksburg. "It is evident from all accounts that the Rebellion is fast dying out", declared the *Dubuque Times*. "The telegraph informs us that a peace party is

organizing in the Rebel Congress. No doubt Peace Rebels will soon be more plenty in the South than are the Peace Tories in the North. The Southern journals talk very dolefully of the situation", admitting that, "if the various movements of forces now imminent are successful, the Confederacy is as good as doomed."

But this good news was soon cancelled by the disaster at Chancellorsville on May 4th. After this defeat it appeared to most Iowans that 1863 was becoming darker than '62.

While the spring months passed, loyal Iowans at home exerted all their energies toward winning the war of the rebellion. At nearly every public gathering, lecture, or concert, collections were taken for the benefit of Iowa regiments on the battlefronts. Women gave much of their time in making bandages and sanitary supplies which were sent to ease the suffering of the soldiers. Pleas were often sent out by the soldiers in letters printed in Iowa newspapers that Northern regiments were in dire need of fresh vegetables and fruits. As a result of these requests Iowa housewives in that eventful year collected many boxes of "cranberries, apples, ginger snaps, carrots, plums and other essentials from their well-stocked larders."

The gloom that so long had hung over the

North suddenly lifted on the Fourth of July. Vicksburg had surrendered! To Iowans the news was especially welcome, for several Hawkeye regiments had played a prominent part in the great victory. "Once more the Mississippi flowed unvexed to the sea". Coupled with Grant's decisive success came reports that Lee had been repulsed at Gettysburg. In the East as well as the West the Rebels were in retreat. The tide of battle had turned at last.

Iowa towns to which the telegraph brought the glorious tidings, celebrated Independence Day in 1863 as never before. Fireworks, bonfires, and speeches expressed the popular jubilation. The full extent of the Union victories was not realized at once. Within four or five days, however, loyal citizens could rejoice without restraint. At Cedar Falls "Main Street was ablaze with excitement" on the evening of July 8th. Flags were brought out and the cannon's "iron throat peeled victory's loud anthem", while "martial music with its stirring notes fanned the excitement to a fever heat." Everybody seemed to be "overflowing with joy" which was expressed in "loud and continuous huzzas."

Typical reaction to the news of victory was expressed in the Independence *Guardian* on July 7th. "The glorious news from Pennsylvania, re-

ceived by extra last night, created the wildest enthusiasm among our people, who, without fully crediting all the details, could see no reason to doubt that the army of the Potomac had achieved a signal victory over Lee and his traitor hordes. Cheer after cheer greeted the reading of the news, and soon the cannon was thundering forth a deep boom of triumph. Directly a big keg of lager was on public tap, at the Post Office, and not a man was suffered in sight without being made to drink to Gen. Meade and his brave soldiers. Our Copperhead friends, particularly, were the subjects of these peremptory invitations. They generally, however, seemed to relish the good feeling, and shook hands and shouted with the rest."

Prophetic of the popular attitude under similar conditions eighty years later, the editor of the Butler Center *Stars and Stripes* on July 22, 1863, indicated the rising hopes of the war-weary people. "Patriotic hearts are made glad by the recent successes of the Union at Gettysburg and Vicksburg", declared M. Bailey. "The mighty cloud that has veiled our future is breaking and the golden morning tints betoken a happy day for our Republic. We believe the time is approaching, when the authority of the government is to be re-established, and our lawful rulers may determine in what manner the traitor chiefs shall atone for

their crimes." A week later Editor Bailey wrote optimistically, "We know that the work is not yet ended but like a weary toiling boy who watches the sun decline and feels that the time of repast and rest approaches, we feel that the rebellion is far past its meridian, and our hard day's work is much more than half accomplished."

The *Cedar Valley Times* of Cedar Rapids was more specific. "The capture of Vicksburg is the doom of the rebellion in the southwest", declared the editor. "Grant, Rosecrans, and Banks will make short work of Johnston, Bragg and Port Hudson. Bragg and Johnston are both on the retreat and Port Hudson is closely invested, and must fall, as Vicksburg has fallen. The southwest cleaned out, and Meade again successful on the Potomac ensures the complete suppression of the rebellion at no distant day." A month later the same editor felt "confident that the war will be virtually ended by the first of January."

But then as now there was need for caution. Much hard fighting remained before enduring peace could be established. In some quarters the turn of events served to rouse the fifth columnists of those times to desperate efforts. Governor Kirkwood was convinced that the disloyal Knights of the Golden Circle, estimated to number approximately 42,000, were plotting insurrection. "It

would be a terrible thing", reflected the Governor, "to have civil war with all its horrors in our state, and if it comes I intend it shall be terribly atoned for by those who bring it upon us." Because of his fear of an uprising he encouraged the organization of more Home Guard companies to preserve order.

Perhaps the danger was exaggerated, but a few disturbances marred the internal harmony of Iowa. In South English a Baptist preacher named Cyphart Tally, who defiantly expressed his Copperhead views, was shot by a mob. Soldiers returning from the front on furlough were intolerant of any opposition to the conduct of the war. On several occasions force was used to "correct" the attitude of outspoken Southern sympathizers. The type and press of the Keokuk *Constitution-Democrat* were tossed into the Mississippi River. In Dubuque quick action by Federal government agents in arresting Editor D. A. Mahoney saved his newspaper from a similar fate. Henry Clay Dean, a preacher, and George W. Jones, a former United States Senator who was in correspondence with Jefferson Davis, were arrested.

Meanwhile, the political pot was boiling. Republicans favored the vigorous prosecution of the war. Democrats, however, including both Unionists and anti-abolitionists, were divided. The re-

sult was a sweeping Republican victory in the fall election, which caused the editor of the *Stars and Stripes* to conclude that the "question of whether the war shall be vigorously prosecuted against the Rebels, or peace shall be made at any price, has been, we think, pretty emphatically settled by the freemen of the North".

With the arrival of autumn, Iowa troops in the South were again on the move. Late in November Grant and his men redeemed the September failure of General Rosecrans by winning the battle of Chattanooga. Nine Iowa regiments participated in that victory and then went on to capture Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain.

"I think", wrote a correspondent on October 28th, "we may now safely conclude that the crisis in our national troubles is past. Many victories have been won in the field, rebel strongholds have been wrested from the traitors, large tracts of rebel territory have been reclaimed, and the old flag floats again over many of the towns and cities in Secessia." This statement epitomized the general opinion in Iowa. The Confederacy was crumbling at last.

Evidence of the suppression of the rebellion was becoming more and more apparent every day. "With a winter before them and two-thirds of their territory again subjected to Federal rule, can

it be possible that the Rebellion can last many months longer?" wondered an Iowa editor. "Let every effort be put forth by the North, and ere many months have passed, we may rejoice that the Rebellion is dead", he prophesied.

As the *Cedar Valley Times* pointed out, the "military strength of the Confederacy has been broken. What successes they have gained have been of no practical or permanent benefit to them. We, on the other hand, have been constantly going forward, taking and holding both the territory and the strongly fortified positions of the enemy."

Though the final victory was in sight, President Lincoln called for 300,000 more soldiers to complete the conquest. Iowa was required to furnish 8910 men. Though this quota was met, it involved great hardship for many Iowans who were more desperately needed on the farms. When the year ended, however, the records in the War Department showed a surplus of 1281 volunteers from Iowa.

In the first issue of 1864 the *Keokuk Gate City* carried an inspiring resumé of the previous year of victory. One significant paragraph was so suggestive of present war aims and the trend of events that in the near future it might be appropriately reprinted in the *Gate City*. "Today the power of the rebellion is broken, and the hopes of

traitors and of the enemies of free government throughout the world are crushed. The foundations of our Government and of the liberties which it secures are today firmly established, and we look forward with assured confidence that our children's children and remote posterity will live in the enjoyment of all the privileges and blessings of our glorious Republican Government."

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