

## Old Abe the War Eagle



In Western Wisconsin, during the Spring of 1861, a Native American named Sky Chief was making a trip along the Flambeau River to trade maple sugar for supplies. That was when he stumbled upon an eagle's nest. With his friend's help, he toppled the tree and captured 2 eaglets from a nest. However, only 1 survived from the tree falling. The surviving eaglet, was traded to Daniel McCann, for a bushel of corn. The eaglet became quite a pet. McCann taught it many tricks such as rolling over and playing dead while McCann played "The Retreat from Moscow", on his violin.

That same year, the Civil War started and President Lincoln called for recruits. Daniel McCann wanted to enlist in the army but he was crippled. So, he decided to send his pet eagle in his place. He first brought the eagle to a company forming in Chippewa but they wouldn't take it. He then brought the eagle to Company C. of the 8th Wisconsin Regiment forming in Eau Claire. The captain of the company, John E. Perkins, hesitated at first to accept the eagle, but his men's arguments finally convinced him to accept. The captain and John McCann agreed that fair payment would be \$2.80 which was the bill for the hotel he was staying at. The eagle was given the name Old Abe in honor of President Lincoln and was sworn into service by putting red, white, and blue ribbons on its neck.

After six weeks of training at Camp Randall Company C. made their way south. The eagle attracted much attention wherever the regiment went. To accommodate for the eagle, the regiment created a new rank, known as the "Eagle Bearer". The Eagle Bearer was to carry the Old Abe on a perch next to the regimental colors. When Old Abe was fully grown a new perch was made, because Old Abe's weight was about 10 1/2 pounds. He was a fine looking creature having a white tail and bright yellow legs. His neck was snowy white and his plumage was brown with hints of gold.

When the regiment engaged in battle, Old Abe was glorified. He would always be at the head of the company, amidst the smoke of battle, from musket and cannon fire. Old Abe would be jumping up and down on the perch, uttering wild and piercing screams. The louder the battle became, the louder the screams. Old Abe was present at every engagement, which total about twenty-two battles and sixty skirmishes. Incredibly not once was a color or eagle bearer shot from the eighth regiment.

The Confederates tried hard to capture or kill "that damn Yankee Buzzard" as they would often call him. However, he was never seriously wounded and only took minor injuries on two separate occasions. General Sterling Price ordered his troops to capture the bird at any hazard, and stated that he would rather capture the eagle, than an entire battalion of men.

On September 26, 1864, Old Abe was formally presented to the State of Wisconsin after three years in service. He was given quarters at the state capitol in Madison where he lived while he was going to conventions and other political events. In the winter of 1881, a fire started in a room nearby Old Abe's. Old Abe wasn't burned, but was weakened by the flames died a few days later, on March 26. Old Abe's body was mounted and put on display in the capitol. He remained their for 23 years, until the great fire of 1904 destroyed the capitol building.

Old Abe is still alive in many ways. To this day the Army's 101st Airborne Division has an image of Old Abe on their shoulder patch, and are nicknamed the Screaming Eagles. The Eau Claire, Wisconsin, Memorial High School athletic teams are nicknamed the "Old Abes". In Racine, Wisconsin, the JI Case Company uses a picture of Old Abe as it's logo. Since 1915, a replica of Old Abe has been on display at the State Capitol in the Assembly Chambers. A replica of Old Abe also is on display at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison.

Logo for JI Case Company



Shoulder Patch for 101st Airborne Division

For a link to photo gallery click  
here <http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/WIReader/Galleries/Eagle.html>

This page was created by: Bryon Myers and Scott Stewart